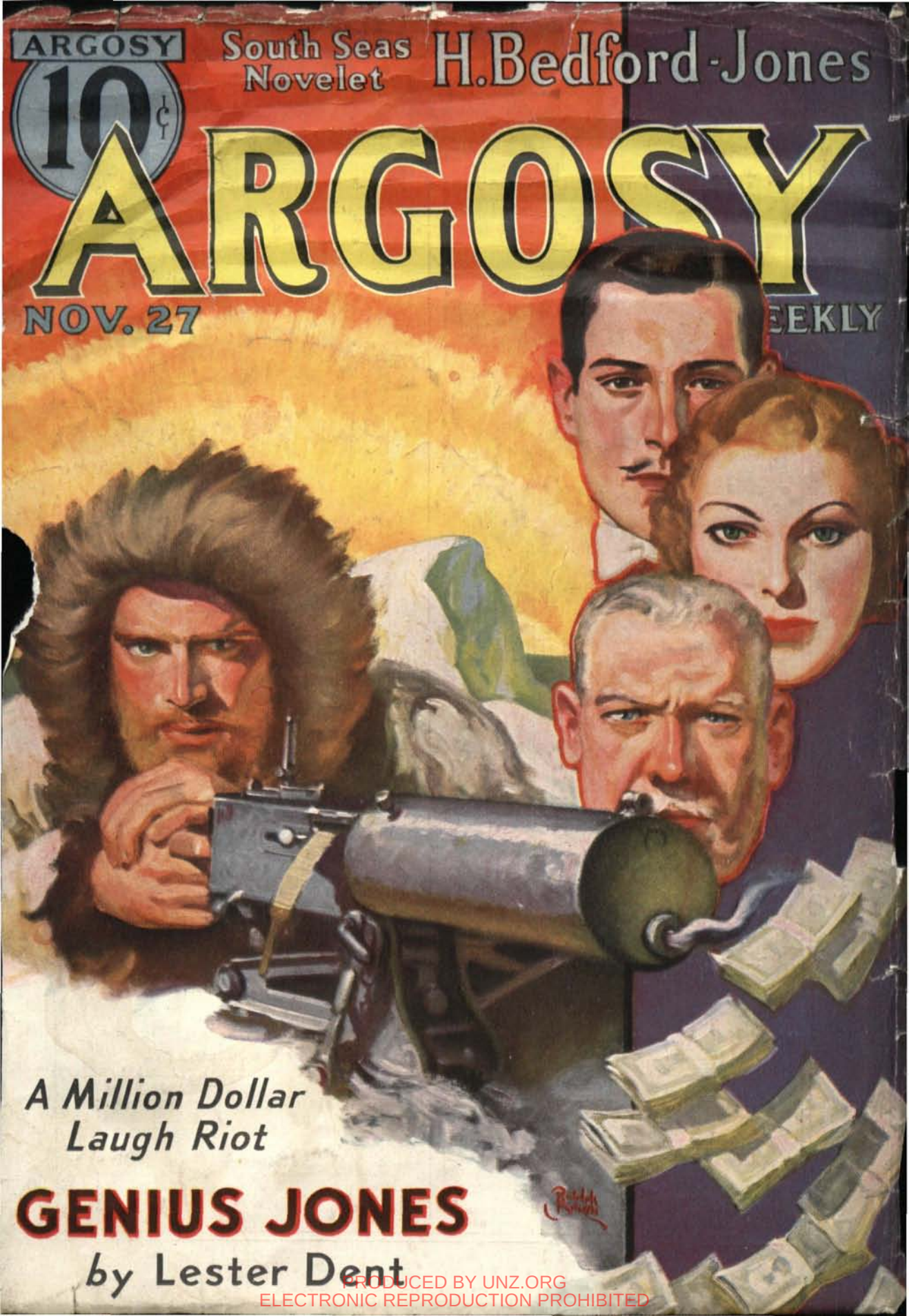

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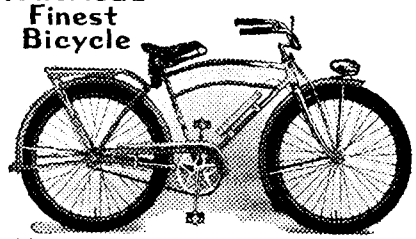

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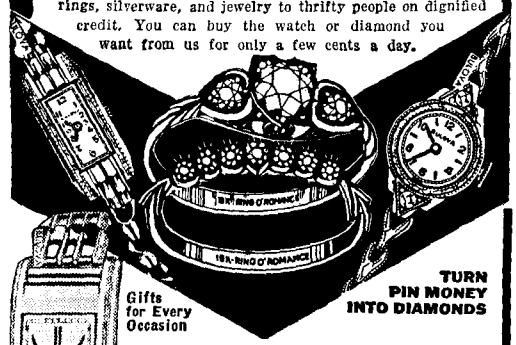

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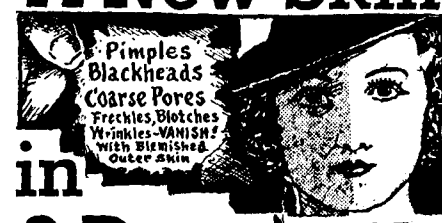

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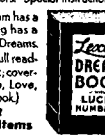

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A North-Pole Crusoe gets off his iceberg and goes to town

Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 33
Roy Hansen—Underwater Wizard

Rebell's Luck—*Complete Novelet*.....H. Bedford-Jones 34
When the devil's sister marries, the best man gets the worst of it

West to Siberia—*Complete Novelet*.....Frank Richardson Pierce 66
That time the Czar made a grab for the shirt of No-Shirt McGee

Sandhog—*Third of six parts*.....Borden Chase 83
Bert Saxon tosses his silk hat in the labor ring and dons a martyr's cloak

Third Classman—*Short Story*.....Paul R. Morrison 107
BOODLE (Slang, West Point): Pickles, cake, kaydet brew and trouble

Pacific Passage—*Fourth of five parts*.....Allan Vaughan Elston 116
The mysterious humpback loses his hump, and Mr. Honuapo gets a hunch

Nothing to Laugh About—*Short Story*.....Edwin H. Hoover 134
No, Mr. Pascoe, a bull is not a man in blue with a badge; it is a gentleman cow

Never Mind, Ulysses.....Chandler McGinnis 32

Pigeon's Progress.....Jon T. Charles 65

Argonotes 143

Looking Ahead! 141

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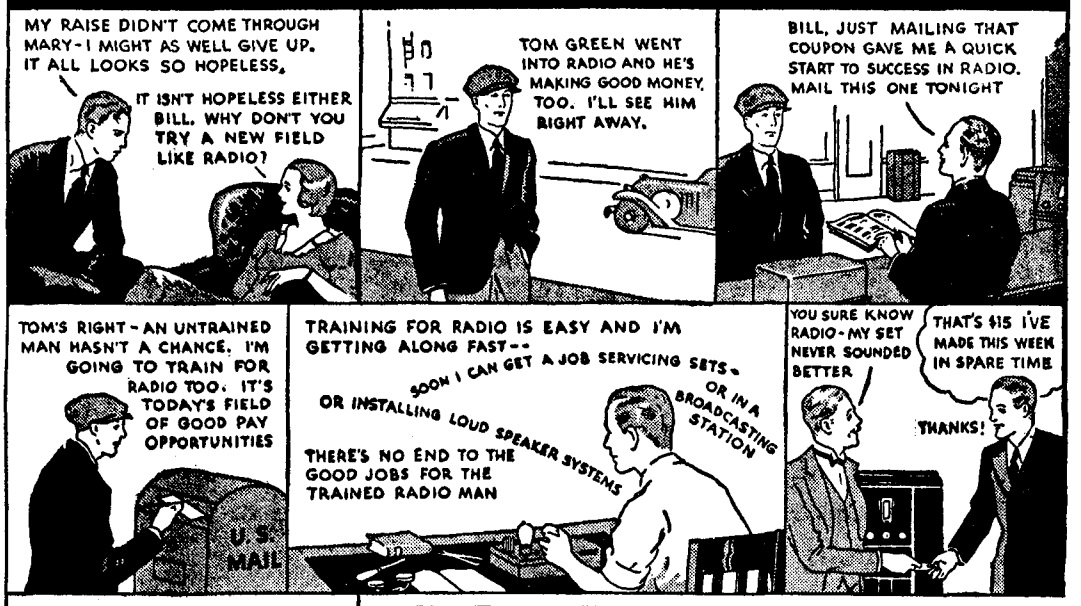
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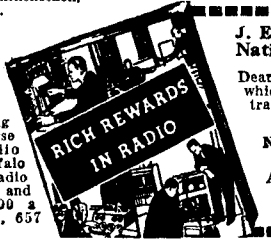

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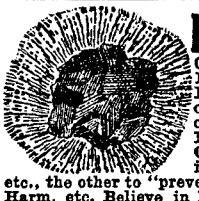

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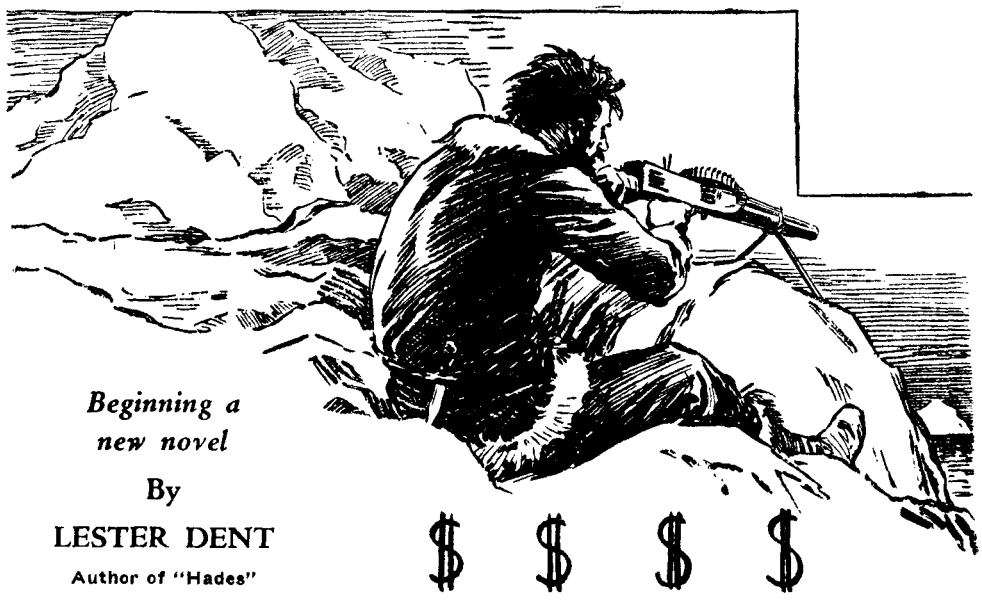

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CHAPTER I

WAR ON AN ICEBERG

IT SEEMS to be a distressing fact that men will disagree about almost any subject under the sun, and fight like cats and dogs over some of them; but there is one point on which opinion is unanimous. And this proposition is that experience is a thorough teacher.

Experience is not the gentlest instructor, nor the best, nor the most welcome, since the fellow who has experience teach him something generally comes away with his ears red. But he has had a lesson nailed fast to the inside of his skull, even if it wasn't pleasant. Experience is an effective old girl.

It was on a night in April of the year 1912 when the liner *Titanic* hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic and sank, and some prominent people from England and the United States were drowned.

Then twenty-five years passed and no more liners sank from hitting icebergs, although the icebergs were still there—a safety record that was a tribute to the way experience drove a point home, the point in this instance being that it was a good idea to keep a sharp lookout for icebergs.

Captain Fritz Hannover was therefore alert for ice as his ship, the German liner *Hildenheim,* steamed across the North Atlantic toward New York, and at seventeen minutes past ten on the morning of August 20, 1937, Captain Hannover's vigilance was rewarded and he saw an iceberg. A large one.

Captain Hannover put binoculars on the berg.

"Ach!" he said loudly.

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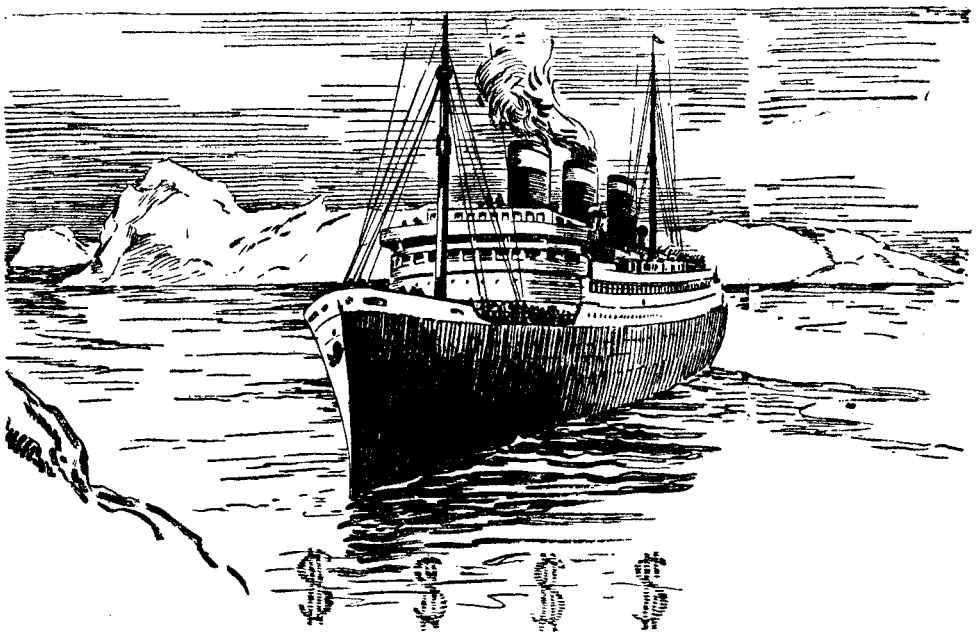
The gold-dusted saga of a red-bearded young giant, raised in the Arctic on seal-meat and encyclopedias, who descends on civilization with a loud and solid crash. In his search for wisdom and adventure, the man Jones doesn't have Aladdin's lamp—but he doesn't really need it. . . .



He handed his glasses to his officers, who stared at the iceberg, then stared at each other. "Is it imagination?" one officer wondered aloud.

"Ach, Got!" said Captain Hannover. "I doubt if the same brand of imagination would come in three orders."

"Then there's a man on that iceberg!"

Captain Hannover was a bullet-headed, militaristic-looking German, aggressive, and anxious to see the day when German ships would carry all passengers who crossed the Atlantic. He saw where his line could get some newspaper publicity out of rescuing the man so strangely marooned.

Rushing to the radio room, the Captain wrote:

TO THE ASSOCIATED PRESS: GERMAN LINER HILDENHEIM ONE OF THE FINEST SHIPS AFLOAT HAS SIGHTED MAN ON ICEBERG ADRIFT IN ATLANTIC OCEAN STOP CAPTAIN FRITZ HANNOVER TAKING PERSONAL CHARGE OF BOAT IN ROUGH SEA TO RESCUE POOR MAROONED MAN STOP DETAILS LATER

The only discrepancy in this was that the sea happened to be unusually calm.

They lowered a lifeboat, and, as it approached the iceberg, growing proximity made the berg seem huge, hard, rugged and dangerous; then a sailor discovered the equivalent of a beach on the west side, so they landed there, and Captain Hannover stepped out gingerly on the slick ice.

"Is there plenty of film in that movie camera?" he asked one of his officers.

"It's full, sir."

"Gut. Do not miss a single detail.

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The rest of you keep out of the picture. We will sell this to a newsreel company. Good advertising." He straightened his jacket self-consciously. "Take a close up, later, of the poor devil's face, showing his gratitude to me."

"Here he comes!"

HE CAME sliding down an ice hummock toward them, a shaggy apparition with what seemed to be a scarlet muffler at his throat. The descent was made by the simple expedient of sitting down and coasting, and he foot-braked to a halt some thirty feet away.

The rescue party goggled.

For now they saw that what they had taken to be a scarlet muffler was an amazing profusion of red beard. The new arrival was around six feet tall, with a nose that was straight and rather sensitive. As he regarded them, he seemed divided between joy and uneasiness, like a young man ready to propose marriage the first time—he had worked up to it with pleasure, but the future angles had him jittery.

He had a deep, pleasant voice.

"Pleasure," he remarked, "is a state of gratification of the senses of mind. Also relish produced by expectation or enjoyment of something good, delightful or satisfying, as opposed to pain, sorrow, et cetera. Probably an instantaneous bio-chemical product. Usually of temporary duration."

Everybody stared.

The young man's upper garment was sealskin, hair-side in, equipped with a hood; and he obviously got into it by pulling it over his head, nightgown fashion. A polar bear had furnished raw material for trousers. Knee-length boots were of walrus hide.

The whirring of the movie camera urged Captain Hannover.

"Ja," he said, "we are here to take you, *mein Herr."*

Captain Hannover looked like the pictures of Huns which formerly appeared on Liberty Loan posters.

The red-whiskered iceberg-man peered at the Captain. His grin slowly collapsed. His eyes went wide, then narrow. He was appalled, it seemed by something about Captain Hannover's appearance.

"Hun," he said grimly. "One of a barbarous Asiatic people whose hordes came probably from the Caspian steppes about 372 A. D. Their defeat at Chalons-sur-Marne in 451 and the death of Attila in 453 terminated their sway. Hun also means a German, after allusion of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who, at the time of departure of his army for China in the year 1900, desired that his men make themselves as dreaded as the Huns of Attila."

Captain Hannover was bewildered.

"Go to the boat," he said impatiently, "so we can shoot you at close range."

The red whiskers convulsed.

"Shoot me—!"

"Ja," said the Captain. "With the—"

He never got to complete his statement. *"Hun!"* yelled the hermit.

He drove his right fist, it hit Captain Hannover's jaw. Captain Hannover arose from the ice, lit on his shoulders, his legs flew up, and he skidded toward the lifeboat, turning around and around on his back as he slid.

The tenant of the iceberg vanished around the nearest ice hummock.

A minute was required for general astonishment to subside, then the sailors sprang from the lifeboat, and one scooped up a double handful of ice water and dashed it in Captain Hannover's face and their skipper made a muttering noise, wiped his wet face uncertainly with a sleeve, sat up,

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blinked, and slowly lifted his right arm in a vague manner.

"Heil Hitler!" he said, solemn as an owl.

He was still dazed.

An onlooker remarked, *sotto voce,* "He'll never get that knocked out of him."

"Catch that scamp!" yelled Captain Hannover.

THE iceberg had appeared rugged enough from the water; but at first hand, it was an incredible proposition, there being no sharp angles, because the ice had been melting in the sun, and everything was rounded and discouragingly slick, while pools of water stood at strategic points where, as sure as a man slipped, he slid in for a bath. The would-be rescuers got soaked to the skin, shivered, swore, and in the meantime the liner whistle began an impatient tooting.

They had no sign of their quarry . . . until a sudden, long, ragged crash.

Captain Hannover howled and bounded behind an ice ridge, then folded down, grabbed his leg with both hands, and wet redness crawled out of his leg and over his hands, and steamed in the cold.

Meantime, a shower of ice chips fell like broken glass.

"He has a machine gun!" Captain Hannover gasped.

Fondness for shelter was immediate.

"I suggest, sir," muttered a sailor, "that the fellow may think the World War is still going on."

"If he does," Captain Hannover groaned, "it's time he was told different."

He raised his voice.

"Kamerad!" he yelled.

"No German," called the man of the iceberg, "is a *kamerad* of mine."

"If you are under the impression the World War is still on," said Captain Hannover, "it was over in November 1918."

This drew a derisive snort.

"Deceit," called the iceberg man, "is an attempt or disposition by trick, collusion, contrivance, false representation or underhand practice to defraud another. When injury is thereby affected, an action of deceit, by law, lies for compensation."

"You don't believe us?" Captain Hannover shouted.

"No."

A sailor had brought along a boathook to assist himself in navigating the ice, and now he placed his cap on this and lifted it cautiously. The machine gun gobbled, the cap turned ragged and sailed away, the boat hook end splintered, and the sailor swore as the ricocheting bullets whined above his head.

"But we won't shoot you!" Captain Hannover yelled. "We have no reason to shoot you."

"Not," said the hermit of the iceberg, "if I can help it, you won't shoot me."

Captain Hannover gave low orders —he was going to leave the man on the iceberg, since he saw no reason to risk his own life, those of his men, and delay his ship, to rescue a man who didn't want to be rescued.

So they went back to their liner and passed the buck on the whole job by radioing the United States Coast Guard Ice Patrol boat the location of the berg and the information that there was a queer man on it, then sailed away, and the last they saw of the hermit, he was sitting on an ice pinnacle, contemplating their departure and manifesting the symptoms of an emotion defined as pleasure. In large bio-chemical quantities.

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CHAPTER II

THE MAN JONES

THE story of a lone man on an iceberg with a machine gun, a vocabulary of strange remarks, a hostile disposition, and a conviction that the World War was still in progress was a good news story, and soon the yarn was being flashed around by radio. The radio operator of Polyphemus Ward's sumptuous private yacht copied the story with other news dispatches which he regularly took down for the financier's perusal.

Polyphemus Ward was as amazing in his way as the man on the iceberg was to prove to be in his way. Polyphemus Ward had been called numerous things in his lifetime. His father came home drunk a couple of hours after Polyphemus was born in a sod shanty in Nebraska, took one look at the blessed event, and groaned. The doctor officiating was moved to remark: "I don't know which is the worst—a father as drunk as you are, or a baby as homely as that one."

To which the father said gloomily, "Yeah, but tomorrow I'll be sober."

They named the baby Polyphemus at a cowhand's suggestion, not finding out until later that the original Polyphemus was a Cyclops who, according to the *Odyssey,* imprisoned Odysseus and his companions in a cavern and devoured a pair of the company daily until his captives put out his one eye with a burning brand, after which the prisoners escaped by clinging to the Cyclops' sheep as the blind giant drove them out to pasture. Those moved to look up the name invariably remarked on how appropriately it fitted Polyphemus Ward. Polyphemus Ward devoured men's fortunes.

When Polyphemus Ward was four years old, he had his first disillusioning experience when a boy his own age—the first tike his own age he'd ever seen—stole his only prized possession, a jackknife. This single incident made Polyphemus suspect there was not an honest man in all the world, and future experiences made the conviction permanent. At frequent intervals, he was jobbed, doublecrossed, framed, and walked on, as he went about the business of getting fabulously rich.

Polyphemus Ward was twenty-one years old when he opened the Golden Glory mine, but by that time, he had learned a thing or two, and the partner who turned crooked on him went to prison, as he deserved, after which twenty million dollers net profit came out of the Golden Glory's clanking ore-cars and landed in Polyphemus Ward's bank account. Then he moved into Wall Street, which is a narrow pen with a graveyard at one end and a river at the other, where sheep are shorn artistically.

After Polyphemus Ward became the terror of Wall Street, he began to take the shirts off international bankers. He was excellently equipped, for he trusted no one, although, oddly, he was scrupulously honest himself.

When he saw Lola Ames milking a cow on a Missouri farm near where his car broke down, Polyphemus Ward instantly realized that she was the most beautiful girl in the world, and that he was going to marry her. He did. To his everlasting disrepute, he didn't let her know he was one of the world's richest men until after they were married. But he loved her, and she loved him.

If any bitterness was needed to make the moneybags a completely sour human-pickle, two things came along to finish the job when the wife he loved

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passed away at the birth of their daughter, Janice, a loss that did something permanent to Polyphemus Ward.

The other was the thing about his daughter, Janice.

FUNNY PEGGER, press agent, and ex-newspaperman who had earned his sobriquet through the same process by which a fat boy is sometimes called Slim, was off duty, loafing on the bridge of the yacht when Polyphemus Ward tramped in, scowling.

"Pick up that fool on the iceberg!" Polyphemus growled.

He stamped out again.

The captain of the yacht scratched his head. "You could knock me over with a straw!" he said.

Funny Pegger grinned and said nothing.

The captain added, "Polyphemus never accommodated anybody in his life. Why this rescue? If there was a dollar on that iceberg, I could understand it."

Funny Pegger continued to grin. He was a stocky, remarkably homely, wonderfully amiable young man. He was, also, one of those rarities, a natural-born gag man—he had a rat-trap memory, and once he heard a joke he never forgot it.

He had lately been offered five hundred dollars a week to write gags for a radio comedian, and he intended taking the job.

"I'm not entirely surprised," Funny Pegger remarked.

"No?"

The gag man grinned. "You're not an observing man, Captain, or you wouldn't be surprised either."

"I don't get you."

"The old hickory nut has a crack in his shell, and if you look close, you might see the tender green kernel of a human being."

The captain snorted. "Impossible. Polyphemus Ward's a cockleburr all the way through."

"For six months, he's been changing."

"What happened six months ago?"

"Janice, his daughter, disappeared," Funny reminded him. "Vanished."

The yacht, a trim black giant as large as some ocean liners, sped toward the iceberg. There was a swimming pool, glass-enclosed, on board. Also, there were: Golf-practice room. Gymnasium. Billiard cabin. Card room. Badminton room. Four bars. There were so many other rooms that Polyphemus Ward had never been in some of them, and they were all air conditioned, for the boat was a floating penthouse, a castle, a château, a palace, and her designers and builders had all been able to retire after producing her.

In the yacht's launch when it went to rescue the man off the iceberg rode Funny Pegger.

On the iceberg sat the red-whiskered young man. He seemed quite calm, until a thought must have occurred to him, for he sprang up and prepared to retreat.

"Your boat has a United States flag," he shouted. "But it occurs to me that the Germans may have captured the United States. Have they, by any chance, done so?"

He seemed to have a scholarly way of stringing his words together, even when he was excited.

"They have not," said Funny Pegger. "And just to get the record straight—the World War is over."

"Terminated?"

"In 1918."

"Then," said the young man, "the Huns must have told me the truth."

Funny Pegger laughed. He walked forward, held out his hand.

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The other man stared at the hand.

"What do you want?"

"Not a thing," said Funny Pegger, "except to shake your hand."

The occupant of the iceberg seemed puzzled.

"The hand," he remarked, "or the terminus of the arm, is a grasping organ sometimes called the *manus,* and consists of the phalanges, or fingers, the *metacarpus* or hand proper, and *carpus,* or wrist, and is a more specialized and prehensile organ in man than in animals, capable of pronation and supination. . . . Shake is an agitation with a vibratory motion, or to tremble, to shiver, quake, as to shake with fear. Combining the two, I fail to find a bearing they might have on our meeting."

Funny Pegger's mouth came open. "There," he said, "you've got me."

"Got you?"

"You wouldn't be telling me you don't know what a handshake is for?"

"Exactly. I recall reading of a custom of the sort, but unfortunately I did not attach importance to it at the time."

Funny Pegger looked blank. "Look now, could this be a line you're pulling?"

"Line?"

"A gag."

"I do not understand." The young man blinked bewilderedly. "You confuse me."

"It's unanimous," said Funny Pegger. "I'm confused by you. Do you want to be rescued, or don't you?"

"Oh, I decidedly do."

"Swell. You do so by stepping in to that boat there. By the way, my name is Raymond Pegger—Funny Pegger. Have you got a name?"

"My name is Jones," said the young man.

"Anything in front or behind?"

"Just—Jones."

JUST JONES stepped across the ice to the launch. He had enough size and red whiskers to make an impressive figure.

"Any baggage?" Funny Pegger asked him.

"Baggage?"

"Machine guns, et cetera."

"I—do you think I shall need the machine gun?"

"That," said Funny Pegger, "depends. I imagine we all have moments when we'd like to use one."

"Er—I think I shall leave it, along with my skin-boat and a small supply of cured seal-meat."

The launch backed away from the floe, turned and ploughed toward the yacht. A slight breeze had sprung up, and waves smacked the bow, sending a cold spray back over the boat occupants. It was getting dark, the air was cold, and the iceberg was huge, barren and depressing.

Jones stared at the receding iceberg, an expression of regret settling on his face, with a trace of moisture in his eyes, as though he was taking leave of an old friend.

"Sort of like leaving home, eh?"

Jones looked up. "Home," he said soberly, "is the abiding place of the affections, especially domestic affections. Also the vital center or seat; the heart or core, intimately, effectively, close; and to the innermost feeling of sensibility. I hardly think that iceberg qualifies."

Funny Pegger swallowed. "Skip it," he requested. Someone had obviously been feeding the man Jones a diet of dictionaries.

The launch rounded up to the side of the yacht, davit-falls came snaking

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down, and the small boat was lifted and placed on its deck cradle.

Jones looked all around with the wide-eyed curiosity of a country boy in the city, or a city boy in the country.

"The doctor," said Funny Pegger, "is waiting to look you over."

Jones followed meekly to a neat white hospital cabin, presided over by a neat doctor. Jones glanced around, sniffing the anaesthetic odor which seems always present in hospital rooms.

"Carbolic," he announced. "A weak monobasic colorless or pinkish crystalline substance produced by destructive distillation of various organics, wood, coal, et cetera, and also a hydroxy derivative of benzene, used much in weak solution as an antiseptic."

"Undress," the doctor said after he had swallowed.

When Jones' sealskin upper garment came off, Funny Pegger's mouth fell open, and it remained open until Jones stood in his naked skin, after which Funny moistened his lips.

"Shades of Hercules!" he remarked.

The doctor tapped Jones, squeezed, stared, watched the little dial of the blood-pressure machine, then got out his stethoscope, stuck the ends of the forked tube in his ears and applied the business end of the thing to Jones' chest.

"Cough," he ordered.

Jones seemed impressed. He coughed self-consciously.

The doctor laid the stethoscope aside.

"Okay," he said.

Jones looked at the instrument, his serious blue eyes showed an attack of intense curiosity, and he picked up the stethoscope, stuck the ends of the tubes in his ears, calmly unbuttoned the doctor's shirt and applied the sound box to the medico's chest. He listened.

"The heart of the human being in the adult stage," he remarked, "is about five inches long and three and a half inches wide, and pumps seventy to seventy-five beats per minute, as contrasted with twenty-eight to thirty-eight beats in the case of the heart of a horse. But I've never heard one before. Ah—will you cough, please?"

The doctor started to cough, caught himself and turned red.

"What kind of horseplay is this?" he said indignantly.

Jones looked surprised.

Funny Pegger grinned. "You know, Doc, I've always wondered what you heard through them things, too. How about giving me a little listen?"

"You two get out of here!" the medico snapped.

"Sure, sure, keep your shirt on, Doc. What kind of shape is Jones in?"

"I never," said the doctor, "saw a man in better physical condition."

"Did you," asked Funny Pegger, "ever see a sweller set of muscles?"

"Never."

"Muscles," announced Jones, "consist of modified and unusually elongated cells, or fibers, which contract when stimulated. They are of two principal types, striated and nonstriated muscles, the former being mostly under the control of the will."

The doctor's jaw fell.

"I don't believe your physical build is the only extraordinary thing about you," he muttered.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGIN OF JONES

JONES was silent as they left the hospital cabin, and wistful, as though all of a sudden, he realized that, for some reason or other, he was regarded as a queer specimen. He grew thoughtful, endeavoring to discern

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what put him in the freak class—what made Funny Pegger and the doctor look at him as though he was a *djinn* that had popped out of a rubbed lamp.

Funny Pegger was also silent. That was unusual. Pegger liked to talk, and ordinarily did so at an appalling rate but just now he was trying to figure Jones out and not having much luck.

Funny Pegger chewed his lower lip and mentally masticated the circumstance that Jones was apparently no normal castaway on an iceberg. There were natural things to be expected of a man found alone on a mass of ice in the Atlantic Ocean, but Jones had not conformed, had not done the expected.

For instance, Jones had not yet offered to explain how he came to be on the berg.

Funny Pegger escorted Jones to the main lounge where there was a group that included Polyphemus Ward, his executive secretary Lyman Lee, and yacht guests, among whom was the Countess Maria Montignal de Grandrieu, a onetime American heiress, now middle-aged, and more or less destitute, due to the yeoman work done upon her fortune by the Count. With the Countess was her daughter, Glacia, who needed a rich husband badly. Glacia was a strikingly beautiful and calculating piece of glass who would probably do the same thing to some man that her father had done to her mother. She sat where Jones did not at first observe her.

They all stared as if Jones were a strange insect someone had brought in on the point of a pin. Jones looked back at the occupants of the room as though they were bugs, too. He did not seem self-conscious. He walked to a deep leather chair, studied it curiously, as if he had never seen a chair before, then sat down in it as the others were doing. He bounced up and down on the soft springs, then registered pleasure.

"Comfort," he remarked, "is derived from the Old French verb *confort*. meaning a state of feeling relief, cheer, or consolation, or a contented enjoyment in physical well being specifically, free from want or anxiety."

The cigar in Polyphemus Ward's grim mouth stuck up at a startled angle.

And about that time, Jones discovered Glacia.

JONES fell to studying Glacia. People usually studied Glacia. Seeing Glacia for the first time was like happening upon an acre of diamonds. It apparently did not occur to Jones that he cut a strange figure in sealskin jacket, bearskin pants, walrus boots, and amazing red beard. Nor did he feel inclined to make further remarks.

These people had gathered to hear his story. Jones wasn't aware of the fact, or aware of anything much except Glacia.

"Er—ahem!" Funny Pegger suggested. "Shoot."

"I haven't," said Jones amiably, "the slightest desire to shoot anybody."

Funny Pegger started to explain that they wanted to hear Jones' story, then changed his mind, for Lyman Lee was scowling at Jones, and Jones had noticed it.

Lyman Lee, of course, was irked by the inspection Jones had been giving Glacia. Lyman Lee had been monopolizing Glacia throughout the trip. Or possibly it was vice versa.

Funny Pegger did not like Lyman Lee.

If anyone else liked Lyman Lee, it would have been difficult to name him offhand. Unless it was Lyman Lee. At thirty-five, Lyman Lee held a job envied by half the financiers in the world.

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He was efficient at it. He was Polyphemus Ward's right hand, or, as some claimed, the velvet glove on that hand. He had the title of confidential secretary, and he knew everything to be known about Polyphemus Ward's business; he knew, some people felt, too much. For this he was paid forty thousand a year.

Lyman Lee was a large young man, too handsome, overbearing, self-centered, grasping. His dress was invariably sartorial perfection, for he usually changed suits three times a day. Lyman Lee insulted his inferiors—and these were legion—fawned on his financial superiors. He had the eyes of a fish. He wore a monocle as if at least to hide the fishiness of one of them.

It was this monocle which intrigued Jones.

"Monocle," Jones remarked. "Probably from the Latin *Monoculus,* or single, plus *oculus,* meaning eye, thus monoculate, or pertaining to one eye. Also an affectation adopted by fops, dandies and beaux, often made of plain window glass."

That did not sink into Lyman Lee for a moment. When it did, he scowled more blackly.

Polyphemus Ward grinned and bit his cigar with relish. Funny Pegger, with difficulty, kept his face straight. The silence was so deep it almost rang.

Funny Pegger cleared his throat. "Jones," he said. "We're curious about how you happened to be on that iceberg."

Jones glanced at the assembled group, then nodded and smiled. "Of course," he said, "you would be. I was there because I got on it deliberately."

Funny Pegger swallowed. "Deliberately."

"Yes." Jones nodded. "Deliberately."

"Was there," Funny Pegger asked gently, "any reason?"

"I was lonesome."

"Lonesome?"

"Yes, very."

"I take it," Funny Pegger ventured, "that you mean you were lonesome on the iceberg."

"Oh, no. Not on the iceberg. I wasn't bothered at all there. You see, the iceberg was slowly turning over. Presumably it was melting unevenly on one side, or something. To tell the truth, I rather appreciated the novelty."

Funny Pegger's scalp crawled. "You appreciated being on an iceberg that was turning over?"

"Pleasure," Jones stated, "can be a gratifying condition of the mind produced by the sensation of emotion, such as excitement, change, novelty, or physical activity. For example, I have discovered that if I run or leap about briskly, I seem to laugh more easily.

Lyman Lee snorted.

"This man," he announced, "is mentally unbalanced."

Jones surveyed the group. All of them, he could see, had the same impression; they agreed with Lyman Lee. Suddenly Jones felt concerned, very alone, depressed by futility. He had the sensations of a fish swimming in strange water. The thing to do, he decided, was seem relieved. He settled back, crossed his legs again, and smiled.

"Thank you," he said politely, "for bringing that up. I was intending to mention it myself for, needless to say, I have detected a strange note toward myself. I see that you regard me as unusual. My, er—conversation seems to startle you. My appearance, including my manner of dress, obviously strikes you as peculiar." He paused. "It is quite appropriate for life on an iceberg, however."

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Funny Pegger grinned. "That's telling 'em Jones. Suppose you shoot your story briefly."

"I—briefly?"

"Yes."

"I was born on a ship," Jones announced. "The year of my birth was 1914. My father was Bob 'Polar' Jones, a man who made a business of taking explorers to the Arctic on his schooner."

Funny Pegger wrinkled his forehead. "Who did you say your father was?"

"Polar Jones."

Funny Pegger grabbed the back of his neck, a private device which he used to stimulate his memory. Suddenly he sprang erect. "Polar Jones!" he ejaculated. "Polar—Polar—why, of course! Polar Jones! The grand old man of the Arctic. One of the all-time mysteries is his disappearance. He vanished. Took an explorer to the Arctic and was never heard from again. Disappeared. All of them."

Funny Pegger was a newspaperman at heart, although his present job was public relations counsel to Polyphemus Ward. He was excited.

"Did you know my father?" Jones asked.

"No, no, that was before my time," Funny Pegger explained. "I've heard newspapermen talk of him. Polar Jones! He must have been a great guy. What happened to him and his schooner, anyway?"

"I'm getting to that," said Jones. "My father took me along when he sailed to the Arctic. I was very small, but my mother had died, and my father wanted me with him. That was in 1917."

"That checks," Funny Pegger nodded. "It was in 1917 that Polar Jones disappeared!"

"The explorer my father took north was Colonel Freeman—"

"Adams," Funny Pegger interrupted. "Colonel Freeman Adams. That was the explorer's name. One of the first scientists to do anything about studying cosmic rays. A bird who was ahead of his time."

"Ah—you seem to be well informed," Jones remarked.

"Any newspaperman," said Funny Pegger, "remembers a big news story. But go ahead."

"Polar Jones' ship ran aground."

"Aground?"

"In a gale. The schooner"—Jones eyed his hands grimly—"was driven so high on the glacier-covered shore of a small island that they couldn't get it off. The lifeboats were smashed. A few weeks later, the glacier moved down, shoved the schooner off in deep water, and it sank." Jones looked up at them. "Everyone was marooned on this island, which was uncharted. Food was saved, of course, and books. Colonel Adams had brought an enormous library along."

Jones lapsed into a sober silence, and the listeners looked grave, thinking of the explorers marooned in the Arctic.

"Man," Jones remarked, "a high type of animal of the genus *homo*, with sufficient structural peculiarities to justify separating him from the anthropoid apes, they having erect posture, adaption for walking instead of prehension, and greater development of the gluteus maximus and other muscles which hold the body erect. Man alone has power to articulate speech, which enabled him to develop power to reason."

Funny Pegger frowned. "I don't get your drift."

"I—drift?"

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"Your meaning."

"Why," said Jones, "I was merely pointing out that man is close to the animal. Like the animal, he does not seem to be able to associate with his fellows without strife."

"I take it," said Funny Pegger, "that you mean the shipwrecked explorers began to quarrel?"

"Exactly. Quarrel." Jones eyed his fists. "The World Was was going on, and there was one German in the assemblage. The cook. The other men irritated the German cook unnecessarily, I'm afraid."

"Irritated him?"

"Drove him crazy, to be exact. He finally put poison in the food."

"Poison?"

"Yes. The German cook must have been insane, because he ate of the food along with the rest, and died, too."

"You mean that everybody was poisoned?"

"Not exactly. The poison was in the beans. At my age, fortunately, I had not acquired a liking for beans, and ate none. So I escaped. Also one other man recovered, having eaten sparingly."

"Who was the other survivor?"

"Colonel Freeman Adams," Jones explained. "He was very ill from the poison, and never the same afterward, I am afraid, in his mental attitude."

Funny Pegger moistened his lips. "I'll be damned," he said.

"The rest does not amount to anything to speak of," Jones added. "I grew up on the island, and that's all."

He began inspecting Glacia again.

THEY were all seated in one of the finest yachts in the world, traveling across the Atlantic in safety and comfort, and it was doubtful if anyone present had ever experienced an adventure more precarious than dodging a taxicab. Aboard the yacht, which differed little from a fine hotel, they were surrounded with all the comforts of civilized existence. Furthermore, almost everyone present had always possessed more money than he knew what to do with, so they all of them were accustomed to smooth luxury, so much so that it was doubtful if the listeners appreciated the privation and horror covered by Jones' narrative. Except for Funny Pegger, who had been a newspaperman, and comprehended that a grisly procession of misfortune must have befallen the explorers.

"Jones," said Funny Pegger, "I want to shake the hand of a modest man!"

"I—er—what?" Jones took his eyes off Glacia. "Modest?" He was puzzled.

"I compliment you," said Funny Pegger, "on a masterly piece of understatement. You say you simply grew up on that island."

"Er—I did."

"Yes—but how? What was it like? Where did you get food? What did you think about? Where'd your education come from? Why wait twenty years? Why didn't you build a boat and leave? What—why, heck—you haven't covered half the story!"

"There were seals and walrus and things to eat," Jones said. "As for education, I recited books aloud."

"You recited books aloud?"

"Yes. At Colonel Adams' suggestion."

"But why stay on the island so long?"

"Colonel Adams did not want to leave. While I was young, he would not let me build a boat. Later, when I grew large enough to have overpowered him, I presume I did not do so because of—oh—pity. Had I tried

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to take him by force, I believe he would have ended his own life."

Funny Pegger squinted. "Sounds like Colonel Adams was a screwball."

"Screwball?"

"Scrambled."

"I am afraid," said Jones, "that Colonel Adams *was* mentally abnormal, if that is your meaning."

"What you're telling us is that you spent your life on that island with a madman?"

"I—yes."

"I take it," said Funny Pegger, "that after Colonel Adams passed on, you got lonesome and decided to thumb a ride on an iceberg." He whistled. "I don't see how you had the nerve."

"It was rather simple. I merely convinced myself that the compensations would be worth the dangers involved."

"Yeah. Well, I hope you won't be disappointed."

"I don't"—Jones contemplated Glacia—"think I shall be."

CHAPTER IV

THE MENAGERIE

POLYPHEMUS WARD had not said a word. Probably he wouldn't. Polyphemus Ward had a habit of sitting around, apparently no more interested than a snapping turtle in a shell, then suddenly exploding and spilling acid over everyone. Ordinarily, he lived in a dour sulk, but when he did cut loose, he played no favorites. He had insulted, browbeaten and put the figurative boot to international bankers, princes, dukes, lords, premiers, a few crowned heads, most of the European dictators extant, and all of his own employees that he had met. They all liked it because Polyphemus Ward had almost as many millions as Tammany has politicians.

Lyman Lee had been silent, too. He was stewing. Or at least simmering gently and threatening to come to a boil at any moment. His feathers had been ruffled by Jones' interest in Glacia and the remark about the monocle. Lyman Lee was the kind of man who got waiters fired for spilling soup on his coat. He had the kind of a mind that took a small slight, thought about it, and fanned up a considerable fire. By now Lyman Lee had worked up a violent dislike for Jones.

"This man is a liar!" Lyman Lee said unexpectedly. "There isn't the slightest doubt of it."

Jones stared at Lyman Lee with mild astonishment.

"Oaf," Jones remarked, "comes from the Icelandic word *alfr,* meaning elf, or an elf's child, usually deformed or foolish, or a simpleton, left on one's doorstep by goblins."

Funny Pegger emitted a snort of laughter before he thought. Lyman Lee sprang up, leveled an immaculate arm at the gag man. "You're fired!" he yelled.

Funny Pegger shrugged.

"Look in your mail basket," he said. "You'll find my resignation, turned in yesterday! I'm taking a job as gag writer"—he had to add—"at five hundred dollars a week."

Lyman Lee turned shades of purple.

Polyphemus Ward spoke.

"No more of this!" he said.

Everyone jumped. A jump was the natural thing when Polyphemus Ward spoke—he had a way of sounding like an automobile accident happening. The financier's tone seemed to irritate Jones.

"I see no reason," he remarked, "for continuing this interview."

Jones arose with dignity and walked out, giving Glacia a last glance. Funny Pegger hesitated, then followed Jones.

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Glacia, looking very gemlike, swept over to Lyman Lee and consoled him with a manicured hand on his impeccable sleeve.

"What a primitive person this Jones is," Glacia murmured. "Insufferable, of course, but amusing in his crude way."

Polyphemus Ward exploded a snort. "Amusing!" he grunted. "So is a barrel of firecrackers—as long as you light 'em only one at a time."

Jones and Funny Pegger headed for a vacant cabin which had been assigned to the rescued man, and Jones was silent until the gag man grinned up at him. "I think you sold a bill of goods to the old dollar-magnet, Jones," said the humorist.

"I—what?"

"Never mind. How did they impress you?"

"To tell the truth," Jones replied, "in various ways."

"Lyman Lee, for instance?"

Jones considered. "He apparently thinks he is the last thing made by God. . . . By the way, who was the elderly gentleman whose voice had qualities reminding me of a bull walrus?"

"That"—Funny Pegger paused dramatically—"was Polyphemus Ward."

"Polyphemus," Jones stated, "was the Cyclops of the Odyssey, who kept Odysseus and his companions in a cave, devouring two daily, until Odysseus got him drunk and pierced his eye with a heated pole, after which Odysseus escaped by clinging to the bellies of the blind giant's sheep as he drove them out to graze. The Polyphemus is a type of moth, also, with a large larva, green with silver tubercles, feeding on oak, chestnut, willow, apple, cherry, et cetera."

"The only difference," Funny Pegger advised, "is that this one feeds on other men's bank accounts."

They reached the cabin assigned to Jones, one of the poorest staterooms on the yacht, hence equivalent to twenty-dollar-a-day accommodations at the Waldorf. Jones entered the room, looked around with appreciation, and went over to test the softness of the berth.

"This is wonderful," he declared. "I didn't imagine people lived so comfortably."

"Some of them don't, believe me. You camp here, Jones, and I'll see if I can scare up clothes for you."

Funny Pegger started to leave.

"Er—wait a minute," Jones requested. "I—ah—I have a question to propound."

"Propound away."

"Ummm." Jones seemed embarrassed. "In that place we just left, there was—ah—a person. It was a—woman—was it not?"

Funny Pegger staggered. "Holy mackerel! You never—saw a woman before!"

"Never," said Jones. "Er—would you call that one a girl instead of a woman?"

"That one was Glacia," said Funny Pegger. "Commonly known as a wow."

"And what is a wow?"

"A girl who doesn't occur very often, but when she does—wow!"

"Indeed?"

AFTER he left Jones' stateroom, Funny Pegger got an ache in his ribs from laughing. Funny Pegger considered himself a student of life. He believed he saw possibilities of an interesting situation. Take a young man of Jones' physique and mental equipment—Funny Pegger sensed that

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Jones had something extraordinary in the line of a mental machine—and add to it the fact that Jones had never seen a woman, and—well, you had something.

Funny Pegger ran into Polyphemus Ward. He started, and instantly felt nervous.

"What do you think of this Jones?" Polyphemus Ward growled.

"I like him," Funny Pegger said frankly. "And I suspect his future will be better than a circus."

"Hmmm!" Polyphemus Ward chewed his cigar. "I'm interested in him."

Funny Pegger, surprised, wondered why Polyphemus Ward would be interested. Old Polyphemus was the kind of a man who never got interested in anything merely out of curiosity.

"Any news of—Janice?" Polyphemus Ward asked suddenly.

Funny Pegger had been placed in charge of the detectives who were searching for Polyphemus Ward's missing daughter.

"The radio reports said nothing today," the gag man admitted. "Still no trace."

Polyphemus Ward would never wince at anything. However, the news made his lips tighten, as they did when he was stabbed. "Sorry you're quitting me for that gag-writing job," he said gruffly. Then he added, "But what puzzles me is why you stuck as long as you did. You only get paid—"

"A hundred a week," said Funny Pegger, "which is not bad money."

"A hundred a week doesn't sound like enough to hold you."

"Doesn't it?" Funny Pegger was very uncomfortable.

Polyphemus Ward stared at his press agent. "I was just thinking about that," he said. Then he changed the subject. "Bring Jones to dinner tonight."

Polyphemus Ward walked away, leaving Funny Pegger feeling as though he was standing in a pan of ice water. "Now I wonder," Funny muttered, "if the old reprobate could dream what I've been up to."

Having pulled his courage out of his boots, whence it had fled, Funny Pegger moved on down the deck. He was sobered. He had started out to promote appropriate clothing for Jones, but this slipped his mind until he sighted dapper Lyman Lee taking a deck constitutional in the dusk with the crystalline Glacia. Funny Pegger got an idea. He was a practical joker at heart.

The gag man confronted Lyman Lee, who scowled, and Glacia, who glanced at Funny indifferently. Young men with less than a million dollars didn't interest Glacia.

"Just talked to Polyphemus Ward," Funny Pegger remarked. "Can you fix Jones up with some clothes, Lyman?"

Funny Pegger didn't consider that an outright lie. He couldn't help it if Lyman Lee inferred he had been ordered by Polyphemus to dress their guest. "I doubt," Lyman Lee remarked coolly, "if my garments would fit that fellow."

"Sure they would."

"But—"

"Jones is going to have dinner with us," Funny Pegger explained.

Glacia gasped. "That lout—dining with us?"

"Yep."

"Count me out. I'm going to go down and enjoy a headache," Glacia declared and made a face.

"Jones," said Funny Pegger doggedly, "is all right."

Lyman Lee sneered. "A faker."

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"His story sounded up and up to me," Funny Pegger stated. "It was remarkable, of course. But the facts checked."

"An imposter!"

"Matter of opinion."

"Probably has some ulterior motive."

Lyman Lee apparently intended to say more on the subject of Jones, but caught himself as a man does when a sudden thought jumps into his mind. Lee's mouth, which had the shape of a woman's, pursed, and he glanced unseeingly at the ocean, where waves ran in orderly rows, crested with last red of the sinking sun.

"All right," he said suddenly. "Send Jones to my suite, and I shall furnish him with suitable dinner clothes."

Taking the glittering Glacia's arm, Lyman Lee strolled down the deck, pointing out formations of clouds, and explaining to his companion how the clouds indicated they would have clear weather tomorrow.

Funny Pegger was dubious.

"That syrup-smeared worm," the gag man muttered, "has something up his sleeve." He grinned suddenly. "However, my money is on Jones."

FUNNY PEGGER ambled into the radio room, borrowed a typewriter from the second-trick operator, and composed in brief, businesslike fashion a news story of the rescuing of Polar Jones' son, an item which he dispatched to the Associated Press via radio. He wrote two different and more flowery accounts, crammed with adjectives and drama, and sent these off to the two tabloid newspapers in New York which had the largest circulations.

Hardly had the stories been sent when the editors of the newspapers radioed urgent requests for more. Funny Pegger stared at the messages, then reread the stories he had sent to see what had excited the editors.

"Shades of Barnum!" he yelled.

He saw something. Something startling. Jones had newspaper "it." Jones was one of those figures that catch the public fancy. The newspapers would take to Jones like they took to Lindbergh.

"Bless me!" the gag man gasped. "With a good manager, this Jones can coin dough."

Funny Pegger at once sent wireless messages to a dozen vaudeville agents, six major movie companies and the three largest radio chains, asking for bids on Jones' services.

He was already blissfully spending an imaginary cut of Jones' future earnings when he ambled into the corridor leading to Jones' stateroom. Instantly, he stopped. Funny Pegger's jaw fell, his eyes popped, and he felt sinkish. His hands flew up as if to push away an incredible vision.

"For the love of Godiva!" he croaked.

Jones was strolling down the corridor. Jones wore exactly what he had been born in.

"What the devil you up to?" Funny Pegger howled.

"Why," said Jones wonderingly, "I was rather warm."

"So you took all your clothes off and went for a walk!" shouted Funny Pegger.

"I—yes."

"You—were—warm!" Funny Pegger strangled.

"The reason," said Jones, "impresses me as being a sensible one."

"Walking around without clothes sensible!"

"Why not? It is warm enough."

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Funny Pegger clamped hold of Jones, rushed him back down the passage, popped him into the stateroom, and slammed the door.

"Ever hear of modesty?" he demanded.

"Er—you mean it is customary not to be seen without clothes?"

"I'll say it is!"

Jones frowned. "I seem to be confused."

"What confused you?"

"The book which I read. The one with the green back."

"What," asked Funny Pegger curiously, "was the name of that book?"

"Nudist Colonies—Their Growth and Practical Sensibility."

"That," said Funny Pegger, "explains everything. Listen, my remarkable friend, don't you know anything but what you memorized from books?"

"How could I?"

"Didn't this Colonel Adams tell you anything?"

"He told me to memorize books and recite them aloud."

"All I can say," said Funny Pegger, "is wear clothes, after this."

CHAPTER V

FULL DRESS

LYMAN LEE was waiting in his suite when Jones came in to dress for dinner, escorted by Funny Pegger. Lyman Lee said, "I think we can manage very well without you," and shut the door in Funny Pegger's face.

Standing in the passage, frowning at the closed door, Funny Pegger rubbed the back of his neck as he did when he wanted to think hard. He was certain dirty work was contemplated. However, he couldn't think of anything very desperate that Lyman Lee could do to Jones, and there was no way he could interfere gracefully anyway, so he departed to dress himself, and to wonder.

In Lee's cabin, Jones stood smiling agreeably and not saying anything, having decided to confine his remarks to yes and no in order to avoid enflaming Lyman Lee.

Lyman Lee was a young man cured in oil. That is, his father had been a moderately wealthy small-town banker. This smalltime moneybags got into difficulties with depositors' money long before there was any excuse for it and, lacking the intestinal fortitude to stand a stretch of looking out from behind bars, had stepped on the trigger of a double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun while holding the muzzle to his chest. They scraped most of him together and buried him. And a majority of his fellow townsmen had sighed with unmistakable relief.

Lyman Lee did have one commendable trait. He was ambitious. For the rest, Lyman Lee was an amalgamation of unlovely traits. He would, for instance, go out of his way to throw a rock at a bird, just as he was now going out of his way to heave a dornick at Jones. To Lyman Lee's credit, however, let it be said that he really did believe Jones was a smart impostor, and not a young man who had grown up on a remote Arctic island, knew only what he had read in books, and was unfamiliar with customs, good, bad and senseless, of civilized people.

Lyman Lee was going to test Jones.

The two men were about of a size. Lyman Lee got out two complete sets of evening dress. Then he began putting everything but his shoes on backward.

Jones stood eyeing the process, completely puzzled. The shoes, he naturally solved at once, and he put them on.

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Thereafter, he watched Lyman Lee, and did exactly as Lee did—he put the trousers on so they buttoned up the back, squirmed into the shirt so that the stiff bosom was against his spine, attached the collar backward, the tie likewise, then got into the waistcoat and coat. This was accomplished with difficulty, a full dress suit being a problem in strategy, even when donned correctly.

Up to a point, Jones was silent, endeavoring to be amiable, but his enthusiasm got the best of him.

"Peacock," he remarked. "A large gallinaceous bird of genus *pavo*, native to Java, southwestern Asia and the East Indies, where they have the Javan peafowl. The fowl is chiefly notable because of the flamboyance of the male as contrasted to the plainer colors of the female."

Lyman Lee scowled, but held on to his patience.

"Does everyone wear these at night?" Jones asked curiously.

"The proper people do," said Lyman Lee shortly.

"I feel," announced Jones, "decidedly bedecked, if not quite sensible."

Lyman Lee had proved his point, or at least proved himself wrong. Jones and dress suits were strangers. Lyman was not happy about it. "You wait here a few minutes," he directed. "Then go to the dining salon. Anyone will tell you the way."

"I appreciate," Jones said earnestly, "your kindness."

Lyman Lee slipped out of the cabin, made a rush and reached an empty stateroom before anyone saw his backward arrangement of attire. Once behind a closed door, he hurriedly removed his garments and put them on the way they were intended to be worn. He smiled in thin-lipped enjoyment. It did not occur to him that what he was doing was small, mean and childish.

Jones entered the dining salon with a complete lack of embarrassment. With dress suit on backward, flowing red beard, mass of fire-colored hair, he made a spectacle that was at least astonishing.

Lyman Lee guffawed. Jones inspected the dress of the other men, then examined himself, lifting the tails of his coat, twisting to inspect them.

He grinned. "Joke," he volunteered, "comes from the Latin word *jocus*, meaning something done to provoke hilarity or humor. In ancient times, kings retained professional jokers, called buffoons, probably from the Italian *buffa*, or vanity, now meaning a droll, harlequin, clown or a merry-andrew."

Old Polyphemus Ward emitted a blast, a sound nearly a laugh, and akin to a cannon report. It was the first time in months, if anyone thought of it, that he had indicated that he might be human.

The others chuckled—with Jones, not at him—and Lyman Lee colored. His small trick had turned to bite the hand that had fed it.

The dinner was a success as far as Jones was concerned. He had the judgment to keep from ogling Glacia, to limit his remarks to necessities, and to watch the eating implements which the others used. Funny Pegger saw Jones make only one bobble, and he suspected someone else had made the mistake first.

Funny Pegger also observed that Jones was studying Glacia with enduring interest. That, to Funny Pegger, portended nothing peaceful. Jones, as a matter of fact, was restraining himself with difficulty. He had not, within span of his memory, tasted one of the

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dishes served, hence the thing was an exciting adventure. After a dessert of a fine old cheese that he tried with some misgivings, a sweet liqueur was served in thin glasses.

"What, if I may ask, is this?" Jones inquired.

"Benedictine," Polyphemus Ward grunted.

"Indeed," said Jones. "A liquor rather like chartreuse, and made near Fecamp, France, and originally concocted by the Benedictines, an order of monks established by St. Benedict of Nursia about the year 529 at Monte Cassino."

Polyphemus Ward gave Jones narrow-eyed interest. "Ever tasted Benedictine before?"

"Never," Jones admitted.

"And you were marooned on that Arctic island all your life?"

"Yes."

"Then where," growled Polyphemus Ward, "did you get such damned detailed information about so many things?"

"From books."

"Books?"

"He memorized books," Funny Pegger explained.

"I—er—liked definitions particularly," Jones ventured.

Polyphemus Ward gnawed his cigar. "What is—ummm—steel?"

"S-t-e-e-l?"

"Yes."

"A metal," said Jones, "named possibly after the Icelandic *stal,* the metal being an alloy essentially of iron and carbon, produced by absorption of the carbon into heated iron, also by a fusion process. Steel, for commercial purposes, is classified as soft, medium or hard, depending on carbon content of 0.25, 0.60, or up to 2.2 per cent respectively."

Polyphemus Ward blinked. "What is a—a stegosaurus?"

"A paleontological genus of large orthopod dinosaur believed prevalent in Upper Jurassic times, and notable for a dermal armor, including a row of upright bony plates along the back," said Jones.

Polyphemus Ward swallowed.

"What," he asked, "is a radio crooner?"

"Crooner?"

"Exactly."

"I confess," said Jones, "to ignorance on that point. My studies of radio theory and terminology did not touch upon any such item as a crooner."

"I'll be chiggered!" said Polyphemus Ward, employing an oath of which he was especially fond.

"A crooner," remarked Funny Pegger, "is a man who sings so sweet they have to close the windows."

"Why?" asked Jones.

"To keep the flies from coming in."

After a dull silence, Funny Pegger muttered, "If anybody wants to cackle over the egg that gag laid, they're welcome." The party sat around in silence after that, and Jones did not feel entirely at home, having a sensation of being out of place, and a suspicioun that his presence was dampening conversation.

What Jones did not know was that he had them awed. To these people, Jones was a phenomenon. He knew everything. At the same time, there was a paradox, for Jones was a vacuum when it came to knowing simple things. He doubtless knew that a heterocercal tail is the kind of a tail that sharks have, but on the other hand, he had no idea what a strip-tease artist might be. He was aware that the atomic weight of hydrogen is 16.00, but he doubtless thought a hot baby was an

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overheated infant. The remarkable aspects of Jones had stunned them, one and all.

When they did start talking, Jones became the awed one. They were a sophisticated crowd, so their talk was based on the popular habit of making a lightning response to anything said, whether the reply was sensible or not, the very silliness of the response often being amusing enough to lend fake cleverness to the talk. It did not make sense to Jones. It wouldn't have made sense to anybody.

Cigarettes were lighted, and Jones tried one. He didn't care for his first smoke particularly.

JONES slept soundly, arose in the morning with a sense of eager well-being, an impulse to rub his hands together. Sleep seemed to have made him enthusiastic. He felt, he realized, much as Columbus must have felt when he found America.

Like Columbus, Jones decided, he was an explorer, the difference between them being that the customs of mankind was the unexplored territory in his case. What men and women did, thought, felt, was the New World for his research operations.

The late hour at which the rest of the party left their blankets surprised him. He saw hardly a soul about until past noon, which did not seem sensible, but indicated that these people did their living at night.

The first requirement for doing the things they did appeared to be to consume a succession of cocktails. Cocktails were a foundation for their dizzy repartee, he concluded, so he tried two Old Fashioneds, shortsightedly drinking them close together, so that both were down before he got a sample of the effects. The reaction gave him a fright. He resolved to have no more truck with anything that stole his mind away so unexpectedly.

The doings of the evening tended to confuse him. The staid souls played something with small pasteboards which, they advised him, was a card game named bridge, and after looking on, an operation they called kibitzing, he got the impression that bridge might be all right as a time-killer.

Sound of music drew him toward the lounge, and he ambled around on the raised orchestra dais, intrigued by the notes that came out of the instruments. One of the saxophonists grinned, handed him an instrument and he tried it, but the noise he produced was discouraging.

Couples were going through gyrations on a patch of smooth floor in the center of the room.

"What," Jones asked Funny Pegger, "are they seeking to accomplish?"

"That," the gag man explained, "is dancing."

"What is its purpose?"

"Why, it—why—it makes you graceful, I guess."

"I see."

"What did you think it accomplished?"

"I merely noticed," Jones said, "that the most enthusiastic participants are paired male and female. I thought that might have something to do with it."

Funny Pegger grinned. "I wouldn't fool you," he said. "It does."

Jones continued his observations, and discovered he had overlooked another form of entertainment which seemed popular. Time after time, he saw two persons leaving for the darkened deck, the participants invariably being male and female. He was consumed with curiosity.

About that time, he discovered Gla-

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cia. He had rather hoped to see her. He hadn't hoped to see her with Lyman Lee.

Glacia, exquisite and white-skinned in an evening thing, was dancing with the impeccable Lyman, and abruptly, they did what the other couples had been doing—headed for the deck.

Jones sauntered after them, intent on satisfying his curiosity.

Retiring to a moonstruck niche between two lifeboats, Lyman Lee took Glacia in his arms, tilted her head back, and placed his lips on hers.

Jones stood observing with considerable interest. He was aware of sensations. He was affected. Stirred. He had a sudden desire to participate, himself.

Jones had observed the technique of cutting in on the dance floor, noticed that it was general, and this seemed a desirable time to apply the idea.

Stepping forward, Jones took Lyman Lee by the elbow. Lee was startled, and jumped back.

"I wish," Jones explained, "to sample this diversion."

Jones placed his arms around Glacia —he found it very natural to borrow Lyman Lee's technique—and pressed his lips on Glacia's. Something kept Glacia motionless. Astonishment, probably. Glacia had been kissed plenty, but never by a young man with red whiskers.

Jones felt something go down to his toes. It came up again. Whatever it was, it was new, and he hadn't imagined there were such things. Each individual hair on his head seemed to get up on end and shake.

He was so disturbed that he released Glacia and stepped back.

"I—gracious!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my!"

"I'll be," said Glacia, "hornswoggled."

"Ah—I never did that before," Jones gasped. "I—er—feel as if something had exploded."

Glacia looked at him in an odd way.

"I have," she murmured, "a new respect for amateur standing."

"I don't believe I understand."

"It must be," said Glacia, "one of those things."

Lyman Lee found his voice and exploded. "Jones, you—you blasted freak! You red-whiskered — hitchhiker off an iceberg! Get away from here, or I'll"—he groped for a violent enough word—"I'll knock your head off!"

Jones thought the man's excitement was out of proportion, but he wasn't anxious for physical violence on top of his other emotions. The cake didn't need any frosting.

"It—er—was explosive!" he declared.

CHAPTER VI

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS

POLYPHEMUS WARD had fought the world. His whole life had been a great battle, and he bore the scars, one of which was his conviction that the human was so constructed that it was impossible for an honest one to reach the age of twenty-one. He trusted no one on whom he did not have a chain. The death of the wife he loved had added a permanent touch of sourness to his soul.

Then there was his daughter, Janice, who grew up with the beauty of her exquisite mother, but also with the bullheadedness of her father. Polyphemus Ward spoiled her completely. He gave her everything. Janice had always been in the storm of her father's contrariness, his explosions of temper, his browbeating tactics, so the result was

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not unexpected. Janice, at eighteen, was a breathlessly beautiful creature with a temper like a bobcat, a determination to have her own way in everything, and no more real human emotions than a firecracker.

Every snapping turtle can get its shell cracked, and six months ago, Polyphemus Ward awakened. A ray of light reached his understanding. He suddenly saw that Janice was something on which he had done an awful job. So he called her in, laid the law down to her, and they had a fight that lasted two hours.

Janice had something that outweighed all her other liabilities. She could reason. Her mind could take hold of a fact, nail it to the wall, examine it, then lay it out like a brick to pave her own path.

Janice told Polyphemus Ward in the heat of the quarrel that she already realized she didn't like herself. She was nothing but a spoiled little Miss Rich-Switch. Her father wanted her to reform. Check! They were in agreement on that point. She wanted to change.

The method of Janice's changing was the main dog in the fight. Polyphemus Ward said: "Bligger it to blazes—just change!" Janice said it wasn't that simple, because she had tried, and it was no dice. The conditions which had spoiled her were still all around her, and while she might struggle for a while, she would be overwhelmed again. It was like trying to wipe syrup off yourself while you stood where it was raining the stuff. Sensible thing was to get out of the rain of syrup.

So Janice got out of the rain.

She walked out. Disappeared. Polyphemus Ward hired and fired private detectives by volleys, but they failed to find the girl. With exactly five dollars in her neat little handbag, she had stepped into oblivion to solve her own human problem.

This had happened six months ago.

Polyphemus Ward at first refused to admit to himself that he was affected in a way that was changing his whole philosophy of life. Perhaps he did not know that he was. Possibly he had been infected with something without his knowledge. At any rate, the disease developed, and it was a disease of good germs, one that was slowly melting the old reprobate's shell, so that the warm meat of a human being was commencing to be visible.

Polyphemus Ward, during recent weeks, had started wondering what would become of his incredible fortune when he was gone, something he'd never considered before, his energies hitherto having gone into money-grabbing, his philosophy being that he'd get the money, enjoy what it would buy, like the power it gave him and the devil with the rest.

Now, he was feeling the urge to do the world a great good. He wouldn't have admitted that. He had never done a man a favor unless he took it back twenty times in dollars, but, without knowing or admitting it, Polyphemus Ward was getting a complex. He wanted to help his fellow man.

He was, in fact, looking around for an honest man to take over distribution of the Ward millions to deserving philanthropies.

The trouble was, he didn't think there was an honest man. The yacht steamed toward New York.

JONES was somewhat less rambunctious about promoting his education. He was cautious. He drank no more cocktails, kissed no more girls. He tied the damper down. He had discovered there were emotions inside him

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that could be made to burn violently. He was wary about letting air at the fire.

Polyphemus Ward found himself studying Jones, and realizing that Jones had assets, that Jones was clean metal, because he had none of the hates, eccentricities, greeds, tinsel yearnings, of other people, since he had grown to manhood without being subjected to any of these false gods of the world, and therefore had perfect ability to select the good from the worthless, true from false.

Jones, not hampered by what anyone had told him, could look at President Roosevelt and approve or disapprove of the New Deal solely on the basis of what it had done, not because someone had previously sold Jones on the idea of being Democrat or Republican. He could go to see Garbo, and if he liked her, it wouldn't be because Hollywood publicity had told him she was a great actress; if Jones thought swing music sounded like noise, he wouldn't like it just because swing music was the correct thing to go for at the moment; and if Jones thought it a sensible idea to walk down Broadway, barefooted, he might do that, too.

Jones had a scholastic education of high order—at least he had memorized whole books which contained sound philosophy of the ages. If he had been influenced, it was by this wisdom that had lived, the only wisdom that man can depend on. True, Jones had personal peculiarities, such as his habit of launching into a monologue on some one thing when he wanted to start a conversation, but that was because he did not know how to start a conversation any other way.

One day, Polyphemus Ward ordered his yacht to decrease its speed. This was done in order to prolong the trip to New York, so the financier could study Jones. Polyphemus Ward was actually startled when Jones showed no interest in return.

Almost as many millions of dollars as Tammany had politicians did not impress Jones. Not only did Jones show no interest in Polyphemus Ward, but it was the contrary. Polyphemus Ward was an old burr who grated on everyone's nerves, and Jones did not care for his society.

Polyphemus Ward was slowly committing suicide. He was doing it with food. He ate like a harvest-hand, took little more exercise than the bronze statue of Colombus in Central Park. He liked his steaks thick, his potatoes mashed and in quantities, and he consumed enormous helpings of sweets. All he did toward working it off was knock the ashes from a dollar cigar.

Jones mentioned this.

"That steak you are eating," volunteered Jones, "will weigh at least three pounds, and will average more than one thousand calories of food value per pound. That makes over three thousand calories in the steak alone."

"Humph!" said Polyphemus Ward.

"Your daily requirement should not be much more than three thousand calories," added Jones. "In other words, that steak should be your day's food."

"Who," inquired Polyphemus Ward brusquely, "asked your opinion?"

"I merely volunteered the information," Jones explained, just as brusquely, "with scant expectation of seeing it help. To be quite plain, you remind me of a walrus I once met."

"I remind you"—the financier purpled—"of what?"

"The walrus," Jones explained, "was crawling toward a crack into which it would fall and be killed. When I tried

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to turn it aside, it endeavored to bite me."

Polyphemus Ward bit his cigar in half. However, as the yacht approached New York, he grew certain that Jones was not impressed at all by the Polyphemus Ward millions.

The financier did some thinking, and as a result was seized with a remarkable idea.

A DAY and a night before the yacht was to reach New York, Polyphemus Ward spoke to Lyman Lee about various business matters which were to be taken up when they landed. Lyman Lee handled all preliminary details with utmost efficiency.

"You're too perfect!" Polyphemus Ward growled.

"I pride myself," said Lyman Lee, "on being efficient."

"The truth is"—Polyphemus Ward scowled—"you're a buzzard, Mr. Lee."

"A—a buzzard?"

"Exactly. You're a buzzard sitting around eating such morsels of my game as I give you, and when I die, you expect to gulp down most of my carcass. You expect to get to administer my money, in plainer words."

"Good Lord, P. W.—"

"Furthermore," interrupted Polyphemus Ward, "you're a potential crook, if I ever saw one. You're clever, educated, and as slick as a greased eel. But when the time comes, if it ever does, you'll turn out to be the worst kind of a crook."

"I don't—don't think so!" Lyman Lee protested, feeling guilty.

"You're a potential crook! You hear?"

"Yes—yes, P. W."

Polyphemus Ward slammed the table with his fist.

"You're a yes-man!" he yelled.

"Yuh-yes, P. W."

Lyman Lee left that conference with an inward concern greater than the expression on his perfectly made face indicated. He had heard old Polyphemus Ward hit the nail square on the head with lusty licks.

Polyphemus Ward sat and thought.

"Hell's bells!" he growled. "I can do *one* crazy thing in my life if I want to!"

Polyphemus found Jones in the lounge listening to a radio broadcast of a swing band, a comedian, and a convincing-voiced announcer who was selling pickles.

"I am puzzled again," Jones volunteered. "This radio gentleman insists that, without fail, his pickles will tone your system, correct your blood count, strengthen your muscles and give you a clear complexion. Now, while I have enjoyed the pickles of which I have partaken, I confess to some doubt about his veracity."

"In advertising," said Polyphemus Ward, "you tell 'em anything, if you can tell it so they'll believe it." He added peremptorily, "Come with me."

"But I'm interested in hearing what further properties will be attributed to the product of the cucurbitaceous vine."

The inference was that Jones didn't care for the financier's acid company.

"This happens to be important," growled Polyphemus Ward.

Jones arose reluctantly, and they went to the sun deck, which seemed deserted, and stopped in the shadow behind a large canopied chaise lounge of the outdoor variety. It was very dark.

Polyphemus Ward handed Jones a package.

"What," asked Jones, "is this item?"

"That is one hundred thousand dol-

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lars," said Polyphemus Ward bluntly, "in thousand-dollar bills."

"I—one hundred thousand dollars?"

"Exactly."

Jones attempted to return the bundle.

"Here," he said hastily, "I don't think I want this."

"But—"

"Thank you," said Jones, "but I don't want it, although I appreciate your gift."

Polyphemus Ward gurgled.

"Gift! D'you think I'm *giving* you that?"

"Naturally. It is obvious that I have not earned it."

"One hundred thousand dollars," said Polyphemus Ward, "is quite considerable of a lot of gift."

"Er—is it? A certain Oriental potentate once presented four million dollars to a stranger whom he fancied—"

"Shut up and listen to me," Polyphemus Ward growled. "Don't interrupt. I'm not used to people interrupting me. I've got too much money." He paused and scowled at Jones. "Too much money," he continued, "for any good to come of it. If I die and leave it all, lawyers will get most of it. I hate lawyers. I could will it to museums, but I hate museums, too. Stuffy places. What I want is to see my fortune do some good. Help people."

"Ah—I am surprised," Jones exclaimed.

"Why?"

"I imagine because I put too much stock in what I have been hearing about you."

"I don't give a good tinker's rooftree what you heard!" Polyphemus Ward sighed deeply. "What I'm getting at is this: I need an honest man. I think I've found one. *You.*"

"Me?"

"You're honest, aren't you?"

"Why—I suppose so. It's a good policy to follow, I believe. By the way, just what do you want with an honest man?"

"I am going to give him a million dollars," said Polyphemus Ward levelly, "to keep him honest."

"I—goodness!"

"Then I am going to hand him the job of disposing of my fortune, all but a few millions for my personal use, in a way that will benefit humanity."

Jones was confused. "But what has that got to do with this hundred thousand which, by the way, you haven't taken back."

"You give that hundred thousand away," ordered Polyphemus Ward.

"Er—what did you say?"

"Give it only to worthy people. To people, mind you, and not to organized charities. Give no more than one thousand dollars to any one person. Keep a record, and show me the record. If I think you have given it to needy persons in every case, I will give you that job of distributing my fortune to charity, and needy causes."

"Give it away?"

"Yes."

"Thousand dollars to a person?"

"No more. Less whenever best. You'll use your discretion, and the kind of discretion you use will decide if you get the million and the job."

"In other words," said Jones, "you are testing my judgment."

"That's my idea of it," agreed Polyphemus Ward. "The rest of the world would think I'm crazy."

Jones tugged his amazing red beard thoughtfully.

"This does seem a little mad," he remarked.

"As a matter of fact," replied Polyphemus Ward, "it is. It's so wacky

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you better keep your mouth shut about it. Nobody is to know about this. Savvy?"

"You mean that no one is to know—providing I take the job."

"Great grief, aren't you taking it?"

"It might be interesting."

Old Polyphemus Ward snorted. "It'll be interesting, if I know anything about human nature."

"I believe," said Jones, "that I should like to try this thing."

"Shake!"

The two men sealed a remarkable bargain with a hearty handshake, after which Polyphemus Ward grunted sourly and took his departure without saying another word. Jones peered after the crusty old moneybags, shifted his gaze to the sheaf of thousand-dollar bills, and decided to stow the money in a hip pocket, after which he strolled away from the spot beside the canopied chaise lounge, where the conference had been held.

Thereafter, two eavesdroppers in the chaise lounge began to breathe freely again. In fact, they took in gulps of air like two prize fighters who had just received punches in the bread baskets.

LYMAN LEE had sat in the lounge, and heard everything. The Countess Maria Montignal de Grandrieu had sat with him, and had also heard everything. The pair of them had been sitting there gossiping about the guests when Jones and Polyphemus Ward came up and began talking.

What they had heard, and they hadn't missed any of it, had practically stunned Lyman Lee and the Countess. They sat in a stupefied silence.

"Uh—excuse me, Lyman dear," said the Countess suddenly.

Lyman Lee didn't seem to hear her.

The Countess Maria Montignal de Grandrieu flounced into her cabin a moment later. She was as agitated as a goldfish out of water, and when she tried to speak, made noises.

"Do you," Glacia asked peevishly, "have to cackle?"

The Countess got her daughter to understand what she had overheard.

"Beautiful bombshells!" said Glacia hollowly. "You mean that Jones is going to get a million dollars?"

"Yes, yes! If he gives away a hundred thousand successfully."

"Anyone," said Glacia, "practically, can be a success at giving away a hundred thousand."

The Countess sighed. "Think of all that money, Glacia dear. Just think."

"What do you think I'm doing?" Glacia demanded.

Abruptly, Glacia began to put her clothes back on—she had disrobed to retire. "But—he has those insufferable red whiskers," the Countess groaned.

"Er—he has possibilities, however," said Glacia, recollecting a kiss.

Having equipped herself with the kind of weapons that came out of a makeup case and the shop of the best Paris *modiste,* Glacia went campaigning for Jones. She found him leaning on the rail, contemplating the Pole Star. Jones gave a start of perceptible proportions when Glacia came up and took his arm fondly.

"Darling," said Glacia, "you and I must see more of each other."

Jones felt warmish.

"I—er—" he said brilliantly.

"It almost seems that you have been avoiding me," Glacia murmured.

"I—ah—thought you disliked me," Jones explained uncomfortably.

"Darling"—Glacia squeezed his hand—"I've only been trying to resist you."

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IT WAS some time later when an incredulous Funny Pegger collared Jones.

"Come over here in the corner, Lodestone," he muttered.

"Lodestone?"

"Well, you've got a magnetic personality or something," explained the gag man grimly. "You sure attract things."

"I do not believe," explained Jones, "that I understand you."

"I could be referring to Glacia."

"I—Glacia?"

"But I wasn't, although I've been what you might call a stupefied observer for the last half hour. I have another matter. A trifling bit of news for you. Do you remember that German-liner captain you shot?"

"Liner captain—ah—yes. Oh, yes. A slight misunderstanding."

"Misunderstanding or not, they're gonna put you in the clink for it."

"Clink?"

"Jail. There's a warrant sworn out for your arrest in New York. I got the tidings by radio."

"Goodness," Jones said. "Do you suppose I will have some trouble?"

"You," Funny Pegger assured him, "were made for trouble to roost on."

LYMAN LEE had been pacing his cabin for hours. He had torn off his tie and collar with savage gestures, and he was stamping in circles. Occasionally he collapsed on the berth or a chair and glared in white silence at the ceiling, while his nails bit into his palms, and his teeth punished his lower lip. He looked as if he wanted to screech.

Lyman Lee had expected to get that job of distributing Polyphemus Ward's millions. It was a goal he had worked at for years, and the shock of losing it had literally upset his mental balance.

He would have to do something. . . . But what? His mind hunted for methods, and because of the combination of circumstances, his mind had become something of a mad dog among minds.

It was nearly three o'clock in the morning when Lyman Lee dressed in dark clothing, took his butcher knife, and went toward Jones' cabin.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Never Mind, Ulysses

SINCE the days of Homer many a seaman has sworn that on the sea, in the night, he has heard a siren sighing, like no singing, but an ardor-tainted whispering—an other-worldly beckoning of a creature of the night and of the heaving deeps. Ulysses was forced to tie his men, and lash himself to the mast, so that they would not fling themselves into the sea in response to the siren's call. How many other men have fled decks for death in the tropic night in response to some mystic sea-creature's love call? Well—wherever they are, those men are probably pretty well aware of their mistake now, and if anyone else is thinking of answering a summons to some briny Bacchanalia, he had better listen to Science first. Science, in the person of a Dr. C. H. Townsend of the New York Zoological Society, has been studying the swim bladder in fishes. These bladders make sounds, Dr. Townsend says, and such sounds may form the basis for the myths of the sea-sirens.

Certainly no sailor is going to jump overboard for any siren whisperings from the bladder of a mackerel.

—*Chandler McGinnis*

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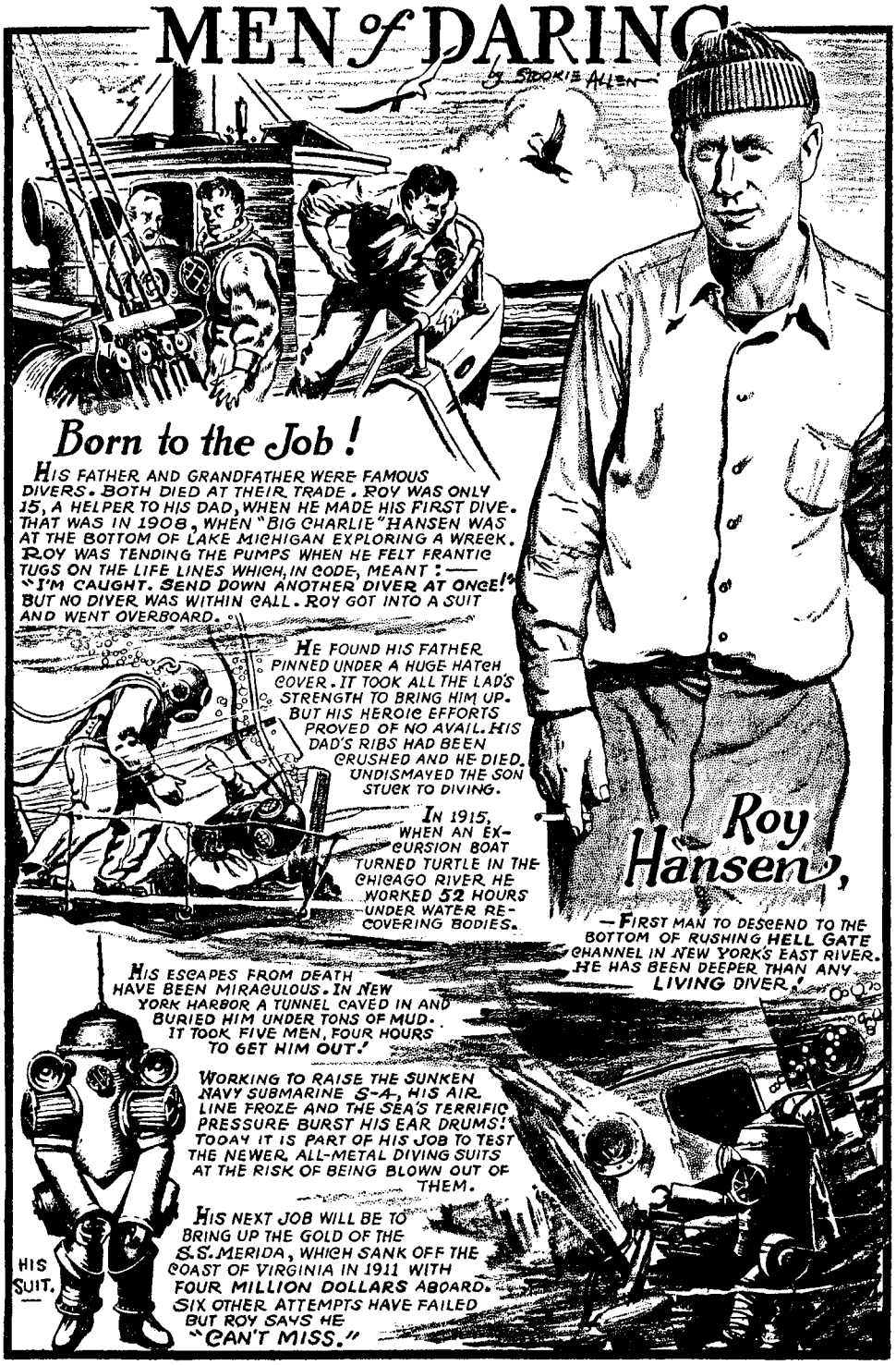
MEN of DARING

by Stookie Allen


Born to the Job!
His father and grandfather were famous divers. Both died at their trade. Roy was only 15, a helper to his dad, when he made his first dive. That was in 1908, when "Big Charlie" Hansen was at the bottom of Lake Michigan exploring a wreck. Roy was tending the pumps when he felt frantic tugs on the life lines which, in code, meant:— "I'm caught. Send down another diver at once!" But no diver was within call. Roy got into a suit and went overboard.
He found his father pinned under a huge hatch cover. It took all the lad's strength to bring him up. But his heroic efforts proved of no avail. His dad's ribs had been crushed and he died. Undismayed the son stuck to diving.
In 1915, when an excursion boat turned turtle in the Chicago River he worked 52 hours under water recovering bodies.
Roy Hansen,
—first man to descend to the bottom of rushing Hell Gate channel in New York's East River. He has been deeper than any living diver!
His escapes from death have been miraculous. In New York harbor a tunnel caved in and buried him under tons of mud. It took five men, four hours to get him out.
Working to raise the sunken Navy submarine S-4, his air line froze and the sea's terrific pressure burst his ear drums! Today it is part of his job to test the newer all-metal diving suits at the risk of being blown out of them.
His next job will be to bring up the gold of the S.S. Merida, which sank off the coast of Virginia in 1911 with four million dollars aboard. Six other attempts have failed but Roy says he "can't miss."
His suit.

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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Rebell's Luck

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Will o' the Wisp," "The Yardarm Swing," etc.

A Complete Novelet

REBELL walked out of Sydney Jack's place, wiping his lips. A feeble voice spoke his name, but he did not hear it. He plowed on through the white coral sand, lit his pipe, and stood with feet wide apart, gazing out at the glittering water and the gently rocking pearlers and his own lugger. This was Thursday Island, stinking of pearl shell, and Rebell had just sold a very fair load of shell. He was not drunk yet, either.

He did not dream of the amazing medley of blood and gold and high adventure almost within arm's reach of him just then. Adventure comes always by chance; the man who seeks it is too often a blackguard. Rebell was trim and hard, his face high-boned, unshaven, his eyes very blue and quick. He had the seaman's knack of acting on impulse, and looked it. A man who doesn't care for consequences, doesn't stop to think about them, doesn't give a hoot for them, and carries that look in his eyes.

No tougher captain ever sailed the South Seas than Bully Rebell. Life kicked him hard and he free-booted back—as honest a trader as ever stole a pearl from an oyster or a kiss from a woman

Most people called Rebell a scoundrel. He took what he wanted. He had stolen that load of shell from some jabbering brown men in the Paumotus, after a bit of shooting. Life had kicked Rebell hard, and he kicked back hard. Existence was a fight. Survival was a gamble, and he was out to survive. His six men were worse than he was. His mate had been killed getting that load of shell—

"M'sieu le capitaine! M'sieu Rebell!"

He swung around, and his hard lean jaw actually fell. Coming across the white sand to him was an amazing figure, a little old scrawny man who came only to the shoulder of Rebell's six feet two. Clad in tattered shirt and trousers and sandals and wide hat, with long white hair and a long white beard, and a rosary about his neck, the hawk-nosed features of this ancient held a peculiar expression of manly sweetness and gentle faith.

"Well, I'm a lobster!" exploded Rebell gustily. "If it isn't Pere Simon from the Mangarua mission—or his twin! Where's your cassock and trimmings?"

Pere Simon smiled. He spoke no English, but Rebell spoke everything. His smile held a beam of rejoicing as he touched Rebell's hand.

"Ah! God has sent you, my friend!" he exclaimed. "I could not believe it when I saw you, when I recognized you. He has surely sent you!"

Rebell grunted. "I don't believe that, anyhow," he returned. "No use pulling that sort of stuff on me, Pere Simon. We understand each other, we respect each other. When I stopped in at Mangarua Island three months ago and you

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"Use my luggage in the service of the Lord?" Bully Rebell said. "Don't make me laugh."

pulled me through that fever, you did me a good turn I'll never forget. But never mind the religious blarney."

He stopped suddenly, and frowned. Astonishment struck him.

"*Tiens!* What the devil are you doing here in this outfit? Have you given up your work as a bad job?" He shoved back his cap and stared at the old priest. "I told you that you'd never convert those blacks; they're an ugly lot."

"You don't understand, *m'sieu,*" and Pere Simon smiled again. "I want you to take me to Lantern Reef and help me find my relic."

"Your relic! You and your blessed big toe of Saint Somebody—"

Rebell checked himself. It came to him that the old priest, who had worked so long on his lonely mission station, was touched in the head. He took Pere Simon by the arm.

"Come along, have a drink. Jack has some of that French wine like you gave me at your place, with the funny name. From your part of the country."

"Vouvray? So far from Tours? Yes, by all means," said Pere Simon with simple gladness.

Rebell, now seriously alarmed about the old fellow, led him back up to the porch of Sydney Jack's place, took the corner chair on the veranda, and ordered a bottle of wine. Then he stared hard at Pere Simon.

"You look sane enough. How'd you get here, anyway?"

"A Japanese pearler put in at the island for water, and brought me," said the old man. "Everything was lost, you see, when the place was burned. I had not even a cassock. All my blacks had run off, and I was nearly dead. I had to find the relic Beaulieu took away."

"Beaulieu?" Rebell started slightly. "That dirty—hm!" He broke off as the wine came, and said nothing more until they were alone again. But now he knew Pere Simon was sane enough. Something had happened. Beaulieu was a rascal of the worst type, a pearl pirate and worse.

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"Ah!" Pere Simon tasted the golden bubbling wine and beamed. "That is wonderful, my friend."

"How came Beaulieu to come to Mangarua—to raid the mission?" demanded Rebell. After all, even for a man of Beaulieu's stripe, to raid a mission was an act a bit over the odds.

"He came in his lugger, with Durant and a woman—"

"Durant, the trader from Lantern Reef?"

"Yes. They came ashore to the mission, tried to get me to go out to their lugger to marry Beaulieu to the woman who had stayed aboard. But I refused, because I knew that Beaulieu was already married to a native girl—at Port Moresby, two years ago—and the girl has not died."

"But the raid?"

PERE SIMON shrugged. "When I refused, they became angry. There was shooting—fighting in the dark. When I came to with blood on my head, the place was burned, several of my native converts dead—and they were gone. But it was of the relic I would speak—"

"They carried away the relic?"

"They carried everything away. They took the relic because it was in a gold altar box. There were pearls, too—votive offerings—"

"Pearls?" Bully Rebell remembered some of the pearls he had seen in the island shrines, gifts from grateful divers who had been in peril of death. "There were many pearls?"

"Perhaps forty—perhaps a hundred. I did not count them." The old priest waved an impatient hand. "There are other gold boxes, other pearls. But the relic—it was of the blessed St. Therese herself, given me by the good Abbe Dinard with his own hands when he blessed me before I came to this mission. You understand, do you not, my friend? You will get it back for me?"

His old eyes rested anxiously on Rebell.

Bully Rebell's lips curved sardonically. "And you expect me to follow Beaulieu—expect me to risk my life and those of my men against Beaulieu's bullets—merely for the sake of an old knuckle bone, an old fingernail?"

"But certainly. You are a hard man, but when you were at Mangarua I knew that you were a just man, too." Pere Simon nodded confidently. "We shall go in your lugger, and I shall—"

Rebell gave him a sharp glance.

"Look here, show some sense! I don't give a hang for all the big toes on earth; yours probably came out of some morgue anyhow. You and your relics! My mate's dead. I've six men. Beaulieu carries eight on that old lugger of his, besides his mate and Durant; that's ten. And they're no angels. It's a shooting job. And if you were along I'd have no end of talk about peace and turning the other cheek and so forth. Not much! I'm giving orders aboard my craft, not taking 'em from any religious maniac like you."

Rough words, but Pere Simon only smiled.

"I'll take your mate's place. I'm not telling you how to get back the relic, my friend; those men took the sword and should perish by the sword. They killed five of my converts. If it comes to that, I can still use a sword myself, perhaps, in a good cause."

"Hm!" grunted Rebell. "I do owe you something, for a fact. But put my life, my boat, my men, all in peril for somebody's big toe? Not me. You'd better go pray."

"I have," said Pere Simon placidly. "And you came."

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"Bosh!" Rebell snorted. "Never mind that rot. You don't know me."

Silence again, while the old man sipped his wine, fingered his long white beard, and gazed with age-dimmed eyes at the harbor. Rebell scowled and sucked at his empty pipe.

He was still startled and astonished, uneasy in mind. He had as good as promised Sydney Jack to run down to Perth and fetch up a load of liquor waiting there. Behind him lay a hard, practical background. He had put by a bit of money. Another five years and he could quit the sea. . . . Thus ran one side of his brain.

The other told him that he did owe Pere Simon a debt. Besides, what about Lantern Reef? Durant had a good station there, just off the New Guinea coast. English waters, or Australian waters rather; that could be chanced. It might repay a raid, Besides—good lord! The old man's pearls! They were worth a fortune. Rebell turned suddenly.

"Look here! Suppose we run down those blackguards? All you want back is your blasted relic—is that right?"

"Of course," agreed Pere Simon. "If we get the pearls, too, you can have them for your trouble, *m'sieu.*"

"Then let's go," said Rebell, and shoved back his chair. "And don't tell my men you're a priest. They'd probably chuck you overboard! Let's get our whiskers cut, and then they won't remember you. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Pere Simon gravely, without flinching at thought of losing those beautiful white hairs that he had tended so carefully, so many years.

"Get your beard off, get some clothes, meet me at the boat yonder in an hour. Rebell handed over some money. "I'll have to stir up my men. Why was Beaulieu at your island anyhow? Must have been here, then went toward Lantern Reef with Durant, and stopped in at your place. I'll find out. Of course, we may not catch them at Lantern Reef, either. It's all a gamble."

REBELL strode off to seek information, and got it like a gift from the gods. Almost the first person he sighted was Tondeur, or Le Tondeur, ominous name. A squat, wide-shouldered man with a face like a bearded mask of evil, and a reputation for knife-work that justified the nickname of "The Shearer."

Rebell halted in astonishment, knowing Tondeur for the mate of Beaulieu.

"Hello! You're not cutting throats for Beaulieu, now?"

"I was looking for you, *m'sieu.*" The little pig-eyes glittered from the hairy visage. "They tell me you need a mate. No, Beaulieu left me here; we disagreed, and he fired me."

"He was here, eh? With Durant?"

Tondeur looked surprised. "You know about that? They came to pick up M'sieu Durant's sister. She had come from San Francisco to join him. Beaulieu is going to marry her—it was a pleasant surprise when she discovered it!" And he guffawed. Then an oath slipped his bearded lips. "That cursed Beaulieu! I'll shear him when I find him."

Rebell surveyed him thoughtfully. "Hm! Durant's sister. Pretty?"

The other shrugged. "No; but a woman. That's something."

"It's a good deal," said Rebell. "Might be worth looking up. Suppose I took you on, Tondeur, and we went to shear Lantern Reef—eh?"

The little eyes glittered. "Ah! I might be worth much to you; I know all those reefs and channels, me! And

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if *m'sieu* is a philosopher about women—good!"

Philosopher? Rebell scoffed mentally at the word. He was not sentimental at all; life had been too hard for women to have an important place in it. He had worked up from nothing at all, reading much, studying deeply—both the things of his business and the things of the world. The books in his cabin would have astonished anyone who knew him, but he did not let these matters interfere with his devotion to business. The sea is a hard mistress. If there were some things he would not do, such as plundering missions and old priests, if he had a certain moral code all his own, it came from a peculiar mental balance these books gave him, and from experience.

Otherwise, his philosophy was simple: Hit first, and hit hard.

"You're a treacherous dog, Tondeur, as I know well," he said calmly, his blue eyes biting into the man before him. "You've murdered more than one man better than yourself. But you're a damned good seaman. Why did Beaulieu fire you?"

The other showed yellow fangs in a grin. "Because he brought a native girl aboard at Cook Sound, and I beat him to her. Then we fought."

Rebell nodded. "And he licked you. He would. You tried to knife him and failed. And he left you here."

"Precisely. As though *m'sieu* had seen it all!" Tondeur guffawed again, shameless. "But I told the girl about him—Durant's sister. I told her all about him."

"You're no angel, are you?" said Rebell in contempt. "But you're a good seaman. Well, no women aboard my craft, and no liquor. Understood? And if you try any of your shearing, I'll cut your ears off for a lesson. Like I did to that pearler who tried to knife me. Understood?"

"*Entendu, m'sieu,*" whipped out the Shearer. "Do we go to Lantern Reef?"

"That's for me to say. Be aboard inside an hour or you get left," and Rebell turned on his heel.

He was not at all sure that Tondeur had told the truth about his disagreement with Beaulieu; it was a plausible story, but Rebell had no illusions about this rascal. None the less, he knew Tondeur would be invaluable to him in a dozen ways, and he was used to acting on a hair-trigger. Also, Tondeur knew nothing of the raid on Pere Simon's mission.

It never occurred to him that the most important element in the whole business might be the one he considered least—the woman.

II

LANTERN REEF lay a couple of miles off the Papua coast at high tide; at low tide it was a wooded promontory tipping the exposed masses of the fringing reefs. At all times it could only be gained by boat from the coast, which made it safer than most trading spots. The blessings of civilization, the inland gold mines and the gold-laden airplanes, had not touched this section of coast.

Even outside the station were reefs, with safe but tortuous passages to the anchorage which they protected at most seasons. There was an inner anchorage, a hidden cove at the side of Lantern Reef, wher a lugger might be hauled up and careened for scraping or for repairs. Usually any vessel lay off the reefs until a boat came out with a pilot. Not that Durant had many visitors from seaward, except the trading schooner every other month.

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"That chap Rebell is a blackguard," Beaulieu declared. "Odd you happened to mention his name, Durant. He's the one man in these parts I'd love to meet —under the proper circumstances. I owe him a thing or two."

"So do I," grunted Durant. His sister looked from one to the other with hot angry eyes, then rose.

"I suppose," she said acidly, "you'd like to meet him alone on a dark night, with a dozen men behind you. That's about your style." With this contemptuous thrust, she went into the long, low house, leaving the two men alone on the veranda looking out to sea.

They exchanged a glance. Beaulieu grimaced, and Durant grinned.

"Here's luck. You'll need it, if you're set on marriage," said Durant, lifting his glass. "She'll give you a merry life."

"Leave that to me," said Beaulieu. "I can handle it."

He looked it. He was slim and straight and dark, with a curl to his thin lip and a cold devil in his eye; a lithe, bronzed, handsome man if you did not regard his aquiline features too closely.

"Just as well she's gone," he went on. "We've hardly had a minute to ourselves to talk about the stuff on hand. No use letting her know what we did at Mangarua; we're agreed on that."

Durant grunted. He was too fat by half, had a swart jowl, and his eyes were deep and small, a shrewd trader's eyes.

"We are. Just like her to blow the whole thing; she's too upright—and proud of it," he said. "Acts like she suspected something."

"She must have heard the shooting," and Beaulieu shrugged. "Never mind! She'll do no talking. I'll guarantee that. I can't afford it, nor you. If news of that job ever leaked out, it'd raise hell. Well, I figured the babies; did you?"

Durant nodded. Each man produced a paper and handed it to the other. Each had listed separately the pearls of Mangarua, and the other things obtained there. Each man eyed the other's list, in a long moment of silence. Only the shuddering throb of surf thudding on the reefs broke the stillness of the hot noonday.

The tide was at ebb. Ugly and dark, studded with dripping pools, the reefs protruded to seaward as the surf hammered them and lifted in white spurts of spume. Beaulieu's schooner lay hidden in the private anchorage; his crew were camped on the other side of Lantern Reef, where the thicker coral masses lifted as though making a bridge over to the coast, two miles distant, with the Papuan mountains rising above jungle green.

Durant put down the paper in his hand, took up his drink and swigged it.

"Pretty good; we're not three hundred dollars apart on the value of the babies," he observed complacently. "If that old fool of a priest hadn't refused to marry you and Lyra, if he hadn't known that you'd taken up with some native girl and married her two years ago, it'd have been all right. We wouldn't have this stuff now, and the old fool would be alive. Funny how things work out, huh? I'm taking your word for it that girl's dead. Mind you, this is to be a wedding, a real one."

"Of course." Beaulieu eyed him almost impatiently. "The island schooner will be along the end of the month. Her skipper will do it. Unless ou want me to get someone from Port Moresby."

"I want no government chaps poking

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their noses in here." Durant frowned. "No; the skipper can do the job, all legal and shipshape. He'll listen to a bit of reason, too. I know him."

"And you'll be satisfied, eh?" Beaulieu's sneer was only half disguised. He tapped the paper between his fingers. "Well, what about the metal? That gold box and the other stuff? Are you satisfied to melt it down and divide it?"

Durant scowled, and moved uneasily.

"No!" he snapped. "I still say no! It's going too far to steal things out of a church and I'll not stand for it."

"You blasted fool, what about the pearls?" Beaulieu exclaimed.

"That's different. Churches have no business with babies of that quality; it's a sheer waste. But to steal religious stuff—no, I tell you!" Durant spoke earnestly. "It's bad luck. I'll have no share in it. I'm satisfied with my share of the pearls."

"I'm not," Beaulieu said coolly. "There's a lot of gold in that stuff, and you know what gold's worth these days."

"You're a devil, Beaulieu." Durant gave him a sharp, keen look. "Leave the gold stuff alone. I'm half in the notion of going back on my bargain with you. I thought you'd make Lyra happy, provide well for her, take the foolishness out of her; once you get her broken in, you two ought to get along all right. But you're showing a side of yourself I didn't suspect. Yes, I might change my mind yet, about turning Lyra over to you."

Beaulieu's gaze sharpened ominously; then it went past Durant and focused on the sea.

"I don't think you'll change your mind—if you know what's good for you," he said. "Not just now, anyway. Not with a visitor coming."

"Eh?" Startled, Durant switched around and sighted the brown speck. "A sail, by gad! It's a lubber standing in for the reef—and look at the course she's holding! Someone aboard her knows the channels. Otherwise she'd not chance the reefs with the tide out."

A SWIFT, vibrant oath broke from Beaulieu, like an explosion. He rose and darted to the cased binoculars hanging from a peg. Whipping the glasses from their case, he drew a focus on the brown canvas, then slowly lowered the glasses.

He turned to Durant. "I thought so. No mistake about it. D'you know what craft that is?"

"Me? No," said the trader sulkily. "How should I know?"

Beaulieu snarled. "If you were anything but a fat pig squatting in your sty, too cursed lazy to do more than root in the mud, you'd know a thing or two," he said viciously.

A mottled angry color rose in Durant's cheeks. "Beaulieu, you'll go too far one of these days, with that tongue of yours," he said rather grimly. "I'm no seaman; you are. Every man to his own trade. No use your making a row between us; after what's happened, we have to stick together unless we want to get into trouble. That's obvious."

"Glad you realize it. Hang together or hang separately, eh?" Beaulieu uttered a harsh laugh. His voice lost its edge. After all, he knew Durant could be a most ugly customer, and with his own flaming temper under control, he had no wish whatever to antagonize this man. He might despise Durant, but he did not under-rate him.

"Well," he went on calmly, "that's Bully Rebell's lugger. I'd know her anywhere. And he's coming here. Why?"

Durant stared to seaward at the

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brown sail. His little eyes widened angrily.

"Oh!" he said, and sat quite motionless. "Oh! Rebell, Bully Rebell—mention the devil and he appears, eh? And to think of him coming along here just now! Last time we met, he cheated me out of a hundred ton of shell, practically took it from under my nose; plain open robbery, it was."

"And you had probably gutted it out of some other chap, so you couldn't complain to the government," said Beaulieu shrewdly. "Well, there's more'n that between me and him. Bad blood and plenty of it, if you ask me. We had crack and crack about on those pearling beds up beyond Darwin last year—the beds they've turned over to Japanese fishers. I got two of his men, he got three of mine and a brand new outfit of diving gear. I laid a charge of dynamite, but it missed his lugger. Got one of his divers who was down in my gear. So we came off practically even. If he knew I was here—"

He took out a cheroot and chewed at it, meditatively, his gaze narrowed on the brown sail. He knew that sail, with the speck of white in it, the white patch; he knew the lines of the distant schooner, the trim and perfect beauty of her. The truth was, he had envied Bully Rebell that craft, had done his best to take her away from Rebell, and had failed dismally.

Durant burst out suddenly. "How the devil would Rebell know these reefs! Not even the trading schooner knows 'em; she lays well off at low tide. There's no charts but mine, and the ones I gave you. Low tide's my best protection from unwanted visitors. But there he comes, bold as brass, slap between those outer reefs that don't hardly show."

"Hm! Why, I wonder?" asked Beaulieu again, his black brows drawing down into a heavy line above his eyes. "Why's he coming here? He knows you're no friend. He'd sail into the lower port of hell, but not without a reason."

Durant scowled uneasily. "I don't like it, Beau. Go back to what we were talking about—the stuff out of that church. The gold. I tell you, no luck will come of taking that stuff or melting it down. Leave it in the box like it is and hand it back to the nearest church. They'll take care of it."

"What? Me walk back and hand it over?" Beaulieu gave him a look of amazement. "You must be off your nut. You're glad enough to copper the babies, aren't you?"

"I tell you, pearls are different," said Durant with dogged obstinacy.

"I don't see it." Beaulieu leaned back suddenly and emptied his drink. "All right, if it'll satisfy you. The stuff's in your box inside; leave it there. I'll ship it when we leave, and hand it over with some likely yarn. That suit you? Then forget the argument and listen to me. About this scoundrel Rebell."

Durant, in unassumed relief, grinned and lifted his glass.

"Right. Cheerio! What about Rebell?"

"Let him walk in, if he's coming here. He won't know my lugger's here. The scraping's about done and her bottom clean, but we'll leave her careened to keep her spars from sight, and as she is, she can't be seen."

Beaulieu leaned forward, intent now upon Durant, and went on quickly.

"I'll keep my men out o' sight. Keep your two boys from talking; keep Lyra's mouth shut. Don't let her and Rebell get together. Find out what he's here for. I'll lie low and jump him. I'd give a good deal for that lugger

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of his. He can sail away in mine, and welcome to the swap—if he's alive. He won't be making for the hidden cove?"

"Can't tell; the blackguard seems to know everything," Durant grunted. "Anyhow, he'll not lay his lugger up in there without my permission. He can stay at the outer anchorage."

"All right." Beaulieu jerked his hand toward the godowns under the trees. "Those two blacks of yours—tell 'em to play sick. Tell Rebell they've got a touch of fever; he'll be scared as hell of getting any quarantine stuff aboard. If he comes ashore alone, trust me to know it—he won't get back. I'll keep the place under watch myself. If he doesn't, I'll come over tonight and chin with you. Is the outer anchorage safe for him?"

Durant rubbed his chin and nodded. "This monsoon, yes. Look at the blighter! He knows his way, no doubt o' that."

Beaulieu rose. "All right, then. I'll slip out by the rear, in case he's got his glass trained on the place. And mind, keep Lyra's mouth shut."

"You bet," said Durant emphatically, an ugly light in his little eyes. Beaulieu gave him a look and a laugh.

"Eh? You worry a lot about me being good to her, but when it comes to your own skin that's another tune."

"It is," said Durant. "She needs breaking; and if she tries any dirty work with her own brother, she'll get it!"

Beaulieu departed with a nod and an amused expression, as though Durant's attitude toward his sister were highly entertaining. Perhaps it was, to Beaulieu. The man, to give him his due, had no hypocrisy about him.

Durant stood looking after him, a frown notched out between his brows. His hands clenched into fists, then relaxed.

III

IT WAS a good hour before sunset when Rebell came ashore in a dinghy with four men at the oars, leaving his schooner securely moored among the reefs. He carried a whaleboat, but was too careful a man to use it in coral ground, where one spike of sharp coral might rip out the thin sheathing. The dinghy was far safer hereabouts.

All the way north, Pere Simon had kept his profession a secret. His beard gone, his white locks cropped, the old priest had become an entirely different being. The voyage had enormously improved him, had brought out his deeper qualities; the dreamer had become a keen-eyed and vigorous old man. No hint of his errand had leaked out, for Rebell had avoided all discussion of the matter in hand. The crew, who were a hard lot, neither knew nor cared what they were after up her on the Papuan coast. Their confidence in Rebell was implicit.

As for Rebell himself, his attitude held no pretense or affectation. He was out to get Pere Simon's relic back, and get what he could for himself in the doing; it was quite simple, and he meant to bet all he could, as a matter of well-earned pay. This was a private war, with no holds barred; it would be a vicious and merciless affair in which the weaker man would go under. Very simple, all of it, and in his own mind well justified—if any justification were needed. Tondeur had served him well, giving him a complete chart of the island and reefs, so that, when he stepped ashore on the white coral sand, he knew exactly what he was about.

"Stay with the boat," he told his men curtly. "Keep your eyes peeled

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If you hear a shot, run her out and be ready to take me off in a hurry. That's all."

It was all, but it was enough to warn them how the land lay.

As he approached the house, Rebell saw Durant coming out to meet him, and quickened his step. He did not mean to be put off. Durant met him and shook hands with apparent cordiality. Rebell took Durant's arm, turned the stocky trader about, and urged him on back toward the house. Durant halted.

"Look here, I can't ask you up, Cap'n!" he blurted. "My two blacks have come down with some sort o' sickness."

"That's all right," Rebell said heartily, never pausing. "You're too easy-going, Durant. Take your boot to them. I'll do it for you if you like. Glad you've decided to let the past lie and be friendly. Never pays to rake up old scores, does it? I want to have a talk with you. May be able to put you in the way of a bit of cash. Come along, we'll have a drink and a smoke, and I'll risk any sickness that may be around."

So he broke through all the preliminary defenses of Durant, who was swept along in spite of his desires and quietly overwhelmed by Rebell's bluff geniality. Unwillingly, he forced a semblance of hospitality lest Rebell suspect something amiss, and once seated on the wide veranda, set out cheroots and whiskey.

Rebell helped himself liberally. He had caught no hint of Beaulieu's presence, but knowing all about the hidden cove, he was quick to suspect a trap. But he gave no inkling of his suspicions. Downing a drink, he lit a cheroot and eyed his uneasy host blandly.

"You know that chap Beaulieu?" he said abruptly. "Of course you do. He brought you down to meet your sister."

"Eh?" Durant started slightly. "How d'you know that, Cap'n?"

Rebell chuckled. "I've shipped that mate of his, that French chap Tondeur. That's how I know your reef channels. Tondeur brought me in. Seems he had some trouble and Beaulieu fired him. I took him on at Thursday, needing a mate, and came straight up here. I'm on a blasted queer errand, but there may be money in it all around."

He paused there, to let Durant worry over his words. And Durant, he was glad to note, worried.

"I've got an old chap aboard, a queer old duck named Chandos," he went on easily. He did not fear to use the real name, for to all the island world the old priest was known only as Pere Simon. "He's out to buy gold —old gold as well as new. He'll take on dust or nuggets or old rings or church stuff, regardless. He aims to do a good bit of trading with mission stations—swapping them some new-fangled metal cups and things for gold. I dunno just what the details are, but with the price of gold what it is today, he'll make money. He's aiming to make a haul from some of the old Spanish churches up in the Dutch islands."

He was skirting perilous truths here, as he read in Durant's face, but his easy affability remained unimpaired.

Durant could not suspect that the Mangarua raid, or its perpetrators, might be known. He could not dream that Pere Simon still lived, had been picked up by a chance Japanese lugger and taken to Thusrday Island. He regarded Rebell with a frown.

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"Queer business," he grunted. "What's it got to do with me?"

Rebell paused and puffed, meditatively. From somewhere inside the house came a muffled thumping sound, as of someone beating at a locked door. The swart features of Durant darkened a little, but Rebell affected to hear nothing.

"I dunno, but Tondeur thought you might put us on to something," he rejoined. "You get quite a bit of gold now and then from the mainland, or used to. You might know a good deal. Pearling isn't what it used to be, now that Japanese have taken over the North-East beds. Fine quality babies don't show up as they did a few years ago."

"Not that you'd care where you got 'em," said Durant darkly.

Rebell laughed. "True enough. However, I'm not running close to the wind right now; I want to keep clear of the law. Another errand here, is water. My butts got started, and we're low. You have a topping good supply, Tondeur tells me."

Durant scowled again at this hint that the visitor might remain for a few days, but he shrugged and sat back in his chair.

"Oh, sure! Help yourself, Cap'n. The water empties in that cove, five hundred yards to the east'ard; boats can land there anytime. Sorry I can't help out with some gold."

"You may stir some up if you look sharp," Rebell said pleasantly. "By the way, where is the sister I heard about? The Shearer says Beaulieu aims to marry her."

"He's gone to Port Moresby now, for a preacher," assented Durant. "They're crazy about each other. Oh, she's got a headache and is lying in her room, I expect. She's not used to the place yet. Tide's coming in, and the surf near gets her wild."

"It does shake the place up a bit," said Rebell, as the table and house shuddered to the pounding surf. "Hello! Sun's going. I'd better get back. Look here, bring your sister out to dinner tomorrow; what say?"

"Thanks. Depends on how she's feeling," said Durant, with a gratified nod. "We should have you ashore, of course; dash it all, with those men sick and no one to do the work, things are a bit off. Lyra—that's my sister—isn't up to much as a cook."

Rebell came to his feet. "Better take my advice and put your boot to those blacks," he said. "Tell you what! I'll lend you one of my men, Jenkins, for a day or so. He's a first-chop cook and handy man. He'll put your place to rights in no time. Only failing is liquor; keep your supply locked up. No. don't object; not a word! You'd do as much for me, and you'll find Jenkins a treasure. I'll put him ashore early tomorrow, when the boat starts on the water job. Glad to do it. Don't come down—I'll see you tomorrow."

REBELL went striding away with his swinging, hearty walk. Durant watched him go down to the shore and the waiting boat, answered his farewell wave, and turned into the house with a muttered imprecation.

Rebell, as the boat headed out, was chuckling audibly. "Jenkins, I'm putting you ashore here in the morning," he said to the stroke oarsman. "Durant pretends he's got some sickness; I think it's a lie. You spruce up a bit and take over the cooking job, and straighten up the house. Keep your eye out sharp for any sign of Beaulieu's outfit. You've got a good head; use it. And have your gun along."

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Jenkins, a red-thatched, freckled, amiable ex-convict from Melbourne, grinned.

Darkness drew down, with the tide at flood and a haze obscuring the stars. Rebell dined with Pere Simon, saying briefly that he had things started; the old man was quite incurious, being in one of his dreamy, complacent moods. He was unhurried, and entirely confident that Rebell would secure his precious relic in good time.

Later, Rebell came out on deck and spoke with Tondeur. The reefs shuddered and shook with surf and glowed whitely with phosporescence. The dinghy was tied under the quarter. A warm and jungle-smelling breeze came off the land.

"No sign of Beaulieu," said Rebell quietly. "If he's here, his lugger's laid up in the cove back of the station. I'll find out tomorrow. Durant had a shock when I told him you were along. Tomorrow, take some casks ashore and put in fresh water; not that we need it, but we need the excuse."

The Shearer chuckled evilly. "Good, *m'sieu*. I'll keep the deck tonight."

Rebell assented; he was not trusting the man, however.

This lack of trust was, perhaps, a mistake. At eight bells, midnight, Rebell wakened and slipped on deck, a noiseless ghostly shape in pajamas and bare feet. The riding lights burned. The men had ceased their card game and gone below. The deck was empty and silent. Rebell went forward to where the mulatto Louis, his most trusted man, sat humped over a cigarette.

"Louis? Where's the mate?"

"He was hanging over the after rail at four bells, Cap'n," said the dark slim man. "I haven't seen him since then."

"Take a look below."

Louis obeyed. Tondeur was not below, he was not on deck; he had vanished, completely. Rebell glanced down at the dark shape of the dinghy, then at the shore. The Shearer knew the channels, the reefs, the whole place. To Rebell's mind, there was just one answer; the hairy Tondeur had quietly slipped into the water and swam ashore. This argued treachery, and Rebell accepted the evidence with a nod.

"Keep your eyes open. When Marshall relieves you, warn him. If Tondeur comes aboard, say nothing about his absence. No boat can come out here without the oars stirring up the phosphorescence; if you sight anything, call me."

Satisfied that there would be no surprise attack from ashore, Rebell went back and was asleep again in five minutes. He had already discounted treachery from Tondeur.

In this he was wrong, as he perceived when Marshall called him on deck in the dawnlight. The men were grouped, and Rebell joined them, looking down at the dinghy. It floated quietly as ever, but there was a dead figure in it—the hairy, wide-shouldered Tondeur. Rebell and Louis went down into the boat and examined the dead man, whose throat had been slashed across by a knife. His position, as Louis pointed out, showed what had occurred.

"Somebody swam out, sir, and called him. He got down into the boat to talk, and lay with his head over the side, talking. The chap in the water sliced his throat with one slash. Good job he bled over the side and not in the boat. Must have been just before dawn, too," and Louis lifted the limp head. "He ain't stiff yet."

Rebell reflected, and dissented. "No.

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His clothes aren't wet. He hasn't been in the water. Not stiff—true. It's passing; when *rigor mortis* comes quickly, it's apt to go quickly. It starts to go with the face and jaw, that's why his head's limp. Try his hand and arm—see? Stiff, all right. No. This must have happened about the time you last saw him, around ten o'clock last night, four bells."

"And who done it, sir?"

"Beaulieu or one of his crew. Somebody who knew Tondeur well. Hm! I did wrong to mistrust him; Beaulieu wanted him out of the way and no mistake. Well, get him weighted and buried quickly; and let this be a warning to the rest of you."

REBELL promoted Louis to mate, and then went ashore with Jenkins for an early visit, as soon as breakfast was over. Surprises, he had found, were usually disconcerting. He had no trouble persuading Pere Simon to remain aboard.

When, with red-headed Jenkins at his heels, he neared the house, Durant came out in pajamas and confusion to meet them. He was voluble, disconcerted, untidy.

"Trouble last night!" he broke out. "Some of these rascals from the mainland were over here. My two men and their women scared 'em off—probably meant to raid us."

"That explains it," said Rebell, admiring the trader's quickness. "My mate had his throat cut; the same chap I told you about—Tondeur. By the way, here's Jenkins. He'll put your place in shape and show you some real cooking. Are those blacks of yours good and trustworthy?"

Durant nodded. "They've been with me three years, but they've got local women and I don't like it. Can't be helped. Well, Jenkins, come along; we'll be glad of civilized cookery for a change, and I'll show you the ropes. Make yourself comfortable, Rebell. Back in a moment."

They were on the veranda now. Rebell noted the welcome accorded Jenkins, and smiled thinly. This change of front meant something; might mean murder, in fact. But Jenkins could look out for himself.

Rebell dropped into a chair, as the other two disappeared into the house. Then he was up and out of the chair, and stepping inside with quick, lithe tread. A glance showed him the plan of the rambling structure. He tried one door, and it opened into a bedroom—that of Durant, obviously. He tried another, found it locked, and turned the key. He pushed open the door and walked in.

"Sorry," he said quickly. "No time to stand on ceremony. My name's Rebell. You're Durant's sister. If I can give you a hand, say so."

It was just as well that he blurted this much out in a hurry, for his tongue failed him. She stood there staring at him, half dressed, frozen, alarmed. Rebell felt himself blushing; not at her clothes, or lack of them, but at her eyes. They were such fine, good eyes. He knew straightaway that she was no woman for Beaulieu.

She was dark and slender; not pretty, perhaps, but beauty is a matter of opinion. Nothing weak about her; rather, she was all a blaze of light—that was the impression Rebell got. It astonished him. Then she smiled, spoke quickly, and he loved her smile.

"Thanks," she said, with an alertness that he relished, "I do seem to be in a bad jam. I'll take any help that's offered, and glad of it."

Rebell's blue eyes glittered in a

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laugh. "Right. Your precious brother's wary of me; can't talk now. Does he keep you locked up all the time?"

"Mercy, no! There's the window, you know," and she gestured to it. "He just doesn't want me talking with you. Told me you were a pirate and worse."

"Might be true enough," and Rebell chuckled. "All right. Slip out into the scrub in half an hour or so, soon as you've had breakfast. I'll be close to your window, here."

Then he opened the door and locked it after him, and was back out on the veranda when Durant came hurriedly from the kitchen. Rebell stood up, stuffing his pipe.

"Look here, I'm not aiming to bother you. I must get down the shore and meet my boat and see about getting the casks filled. With my mate dead, I'm short-handed. Will you and your sister be out for dinner this evening?"

"We'll be delighted," Durant said unexpectedly. "That is, if she's feeling well. But I've only two men to handle our whaleboat—"

"I'll come in and pick you up, then, around six," and Rebell nodded. "Whenever you come down to the shore, eh? Right. And you you have any trouble with blacks from the coast, I'll pitch in with you and give 'em a sharp lesson. See you fonight, then!"

He swung away, heading down the shore to the left. His boat was angling over from the schooner, four men at the oars, casks in tow. With Jenkins ashore here, that left one man aboard the schooner, and Pere Simon. Risky, perhaps, but rifles were close at hand.

Pandanus scrub and other brush pretty well covered Lantern Reef, Durant being too lazy to clear it off. When Rebell had his men started at work, he circled back and took cautious position, well hidden.

SHE appeared at last, sauntering, not hastening, but with anxiety growing in her face. Within six feet of him, she halted to gaze around. Rebell was up and at her side in two steps; catching her in his arms, he kissed her swiftly and laughed down into her startled, blazing eyes.

"Come along out o' sight," he exclaimed, and drew her quickly to the fringe of mangroves along the shore. There, secure, he would have kissed her again, but her eyes checked him, and her quiet voice, edged with scorn.

"So you're just a beast, as they said! Or am I supposed to pay you for helping me?

Rebell thrust her away. "Nonsense! I'll kiss no unwilling woman; if that's the way you take it, go without." He paused and looked at her angrily, all the strength of him in shining eyes and hard, chiseled features. "What are you, some school teacher to be afraid of a kiss?"

"No; not ready for a kiss, that's all," and to his new surprise, she laughed a little. "I fear you don't know schoolteachers very well, Captain Rebell."

He waved her words away. "I'm not interested in verbal sparring; forget it," he said brusquely. "Suppose we stick to business, since that's your wish. You're in a mess; what's behind it? Why does this brother of yours try to wish you off on Beaulieu?"

She met his gaze, suddenly so hard and cold and piercing. The change in him must have hit her like a blow. Then she found voice.

"I've not seen him for ten years or more. I came into some money, and invested it in his business here. Now I've come out to see about things—and he wants to force me into marrying Captain Beaulieu."

"Few words, and the ground all cov-

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ered," commented Rebell, with an approving nod. "I get you. Then you don't have any too much affection for Durant?"

"None at all," she said curtly. "He's changed terribly. I never dreamed he could be what he is."

"Wait till you know him better," Rebell said drily. "Well, I get the picture. I can see why Beaulieu wants you; I'd want you myself. Anyone would. But Beaulieu—well, you might do better. He'd break you inside a week till you were crawling."

"I'd kill him first!" she flashed out. He shook his head.

"No. That blighter's going to take more killing than you could hand out. He's here and hiding in the cove with his lugger, isn't he? I thought so." His brown features grew lean and taut. "Well, they're drawn first blood on me and I've got to go slow, blast it. Can't do much till I find where the gold and pearls are."

She searched his face inquiringly. "Gold? Pearls? What are you talking about?"

"Loot from the mission station at Mangarua. Where Pere Simon wouldn't marry you to Beaulieu, they killed him and looted the place."

At this, her lips went white. "Oh! That island where we stopped—the shooting! You say, they killed a priest?"

"Killed more than him alone," said Rebell, tugging at one ear, thoughtfully. "He got away, but they don't know it. See here! You're so touchy about a kiss—you can pay if you want help. I'll help you if you help me. You're coming aboard for dinner tonight."

"I know." She nodded quickly. "He just told me. Then he went to find Beaulieu; that's how I was able to get away just now. He's got some scheme about it; you must be careful."

"Don't you worry; I know when I'm on poison coral," Rebell said grimly. "All right. You trot back and take a look around. He brought some stuff ashore from the lugger; find it. Gold cups and things from the church. It'll be bulky. Beaulieu probably kept the pearls. You find it, make sure where it all is; and tonight hell will begin to pop. Can do?"

"Why, yes." She was still watching him, fascinated by the play of energy in his face. "I'll tell you something else. I heard them talking. Beaulieu wants above everything to get hold of your ship—lugger, he called her."

Rebell stood motionless, lost in thought, groping for something, some clue, these words suggested to him. His schooner was good, yes; she was better than good. Until half an hour ago she had been the very apple of his eye. But now that was changed.

If he kept his bargain with Pere Simon, the pearls were his, and he wanted them; but he must earn them by getting what the old priest wanted most. Those pearls, he knew, were worth a small fortune. With what he had already, his private dreams would come true; he could leave all this, shake the stink of copra and the noisome pearl shell from him and leave these seas forever. And now, he knew, he wanted something else even worse. His needs had grown. Not just a woman, but all the greater things that the one woman implied.

He looked suddenly at the girl, and his blue eyes burned.

"Your brother's gone, and we can talk. Listen," he said slowly, "All they said about me is true, maybe. But I'm no liar. If I pull off this job for Pere

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Simon and myself, it means killing. Beaulieu and maybe your brother, maybe me as well. No telling. It means the whole future at stake for me, and I'll do my best for it. But now you're in it as well. And I'll not lie to you.

"I'm not all brute," he went on, a dull flush rising under his tan. "I've been around a bit. I'm no angel and no saint; I don't want to be either one? I've spent my life learning to fight back."

He stopped abruptly, got out his empty pipe, and sucked at it.

"Well?" she asked. He shook his head.

"I don't know; that's all, I guess. I just lost my head for a minute."

"It's very becoming," she said, and her eyes shone. "Next time you lose it, don't break off halfway; spill everything. Goodbye, till tonight!"

She was gone, with a light laugh trailing behind her. Rebell gaped at the empty trees, started impulsively to follow her, then turned and plodded off toward where his men were at work. And they wondered at the hearty eager laughter of him.

IV

THAT afternoon Rebell gathered his five men and Pere Simon under the awning on the afterdeck. The words of the girl lingered with him: *"He's got some scheme about it."* Yes, Durant had some scheme. If he brought the girl aboard to dinner, it would be with some deep purpose. Not for nothing would he and Beaulieu let her get acquainted with Rebell!

"Now," he said to the old priest, "you remember our bargain; you're not objecting to anything I do! Right?"

"Understood, *m'sieu,*" said Pere Simon. The men, who had never been able to fathom him, eyed him curiously and wondered where he came into this game. Rebel turned to the five of them, and nodded at the cook.

"Bill, you stay aboard and attend to serving dinner. The rest of you, stand by. I don't know what to expect, for a fact. If you bring Durant and his sister aboard, look for some word from me and act accordingly. Here's what's in my mind. First off, get the whaleboat in the water and leave her ready. Do this as soon as it's dark, not before."

He paused, abruptly conscious that he was belying himself. Here he was letting go with a rush, aiming at a swiftly sudden stroke this same night; yet a little while ago he had visioned a lack of all haste. The thought of Beaulieu was spurring him on. That man would not withhold a second blow; he must fight fire with fire, meet Beaulieu on his own ground—the offensive. Such was the urge, his natural urge.

He gathered his forces to resist it, obstinately.

"You boys might as well know what I'm after. Beaulieu's got a belt full of stolen pearls; I wan't 'em. You'll all get your share, if we win. I'm after other things too, but not for myself. This time, we go slow. You," and he turned to Pere Simon, "are Monsieur Chandos, and you're here buying gold, any kind of gold. Remember that when Durant comes aboard. If you forget it, you'll ruin us all. Can I trust you to play the part?"

Pere Simon smiled, under the curious eyes of the crew, under the hard, harsh stare of Rebell's blue eyes. His wrinkled old features were composed, his gaze was keen.

"My friend," he said in French, "at Thursday Island I spoke to you of using a sword if necessary. Those were hot words, uttered in despair. They do

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not become me, for I cannot take life. However, you may trust me absolutely to play the part you suggest."

Rebell liked the firmness of this speech, the quiet strength of it. He nodded. "Fine . . . boys, put an extra rifle in the whaleboat for me. We'll use the dinghy otherwise and leave her in plain sight. Remember, too, that Beaulieu or his mate has got us under a glass all the time. Better make another trip for more water. Sam, bring aft to the cabin that coil of extra fuse I put aboard at Thursday; and keep it covered from sight. Remember the binoculars ashore. Yes—bring the brace and a half-inch bit from the tool chest, also. And the cabin paint kit."

He went down to the after-cabin. The tools and the fuse came. Rebell had the transom opened for air, then fell to work, whistling between his teeth. From time to time he cast a sardonic glance at Pere Simon, who was settled in a chair reading his breviary. The old boy, he thought, would have several kinds of fits if he knew where that fuse led, and what it meant!

Not that anyone would know or guess, for the fuse connected with another that led down past a bulkhead and into the lazaret below. Rebell worked carefully with his new length of fuse. He bored a hole in the door of the locker, close to his corner desk, and filled the hole with putty—from which a few inches of the fuse protrude. These he clipped off, so that nothing showed. Over the putty he carefully laid white paint to match the locker door. The fuse-end looked like a tack driven into the door.

From a small, ancient wall-safe, Rebell took his most precious belongings and stowed them into a broad money-belt with many stout pockets. With this buckled under his garments, he inspected and loaded two automatic pistols; then he disappeared into the lazaret below, where he worked for some time, noisily. When at length he knocked off and got into a clean shirt for dinner, he was very cheerful. He liked to have things ship-shape with a view to any emergency. It left his mind clear for action.

And, he reflected as he dressed, he certainly had things ship-shape now.

Bill, the cook, was clattering about the mess cabin, and at a low hail from the deck, stuck his head into the after-cabin.

"Looks like a man and a woman coming from the house down to the shore, sir," he reported. "Close to six bells, too. I'll have dinner ready in half an hour."

"Get some drinks up on deck," said Rebell and he hastily ascended, telling the four men there to get ashore in the dinghy and pick up the two guests.

"I'll be waiting with a rifle handy," he added. "Send the lady up first and then make some excuse to delay Durant, so I can have a word with her alone."

The men got off with the boat. Rebell waited, a hidden rifle close to hand, on the after deck, And as he waited, it came to him how he was depending on this girl and a few words from her, for his whole plan of campaign. He eyed the shore hungrily, watched the brush with his glasses, found nothing untoward. Durant and his sister were at the beach, as the boat came in to them. Durant handed in the girl, and followed.

With this, Rebell's brain flew ahead. No ambush from the boat, then; but what? Why was Durant bringing Lyra aboard? She had herself feared some purpose in it. Wait and see, Rebell

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counseled himself. There might be some word from Jenkins, too. A sharp fellow, Jenkins. The thought held patience. With Durant and his sister gone, Jenkins would be alone there at the station. The black servants, obviously, counted for little.

THE boat crept out. Pere Simon appeared and joined Rebell, looking at the boat.

"That is the man Durant," he said quietly. "The young woman seems attractive. I do not wonder that you were so eager to kiss her, *m'sieu.*"

Rebell swung on him, amazed. "How the devil—"

"I was watching through your glasses," the old priest chuckled.

"Oh!" Rebell relaxed and grinned sheepishly. Yes, they had been concealed from view of the house, but not from view of anyone here aboard the schooner. He met the amused gaze of Pere Simon, and grinned again. "That girl," he said, "grows on you. I'd not be surprised if Beaulieu is really in love with her—as he understands love. Anyhow, she's bringing me word about the relic and so on, I hope."

They said no more, but waited. The boat crept in under the ladder, and Rebell sang out a hearty greeting to Durant.

Lyra came up the ladder. Before her brother could follow, there was an explosion of oaths among the men in the boat. One of them was knocked sprawling. The boat rocked violently. Rebell caught the girl's hand as she came to the deck and spoke under his breath.

"All right. Talk quick. What news?"

"It's there," she breathed. "The seaman's chest, in his bedroom, under his bed. But be careful! They've planned something. I don't know what. Your man Jenkins was taken away. Beaulieu came and took him."

Rebell laughed. "Don't worry about him. Who's at the house now? The blacks?"

She shook her head. "No one's there. The blacks are in their own huts."

Durant came over the rail. "Ah! Lyra, this is Cap'n Rebell. And this—"

"Monsieur Chandos," and Rebell indicated the old priest. "He doesn't speak much English. You speak French, Miss Durant? Good! Well, Durant, come along aft and have a snifter. I'll settle those rascals of mine and be right along."

Moving with his astonishing agility, Rebell was over the rail and down the ladder. He spoke rapidly, softly, to Louis, the mulatto.

"Tow some casks over to the mouth of the creek, right away. Get up to the house through the brush. There's a chest under the bed in the first bedroom, get it. Touch nothing else. If anyone's in or around the house, don't chance a fight."

Then he was nimbly regaining the deck, to join his guests under the after awning, where Bill was ready with the drinks. The sun was still well above the horizon.

Pere Simon and Lyra were talking together in French. Rebell joined Durant and clinked glasses with him.

"Jenkins taking hold all right? That's good. You can keep him over tomorrow, and I'll be off next morning. These blasted men of mine aren't worth their salt. Should have had the water butts filled today, and didn't get it done. I've sent 'em over for another load. Glad your sister's feeling better. She looks fit."

"Oh, she's coming around," said Durant, his greedy little eyes flitting about.

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"Seen any more of those blacks from the mainland?"

"No," said Durant, frowning. "I don't understand it. I've got my people keeping a lookout tonight. You'd better do the same."

"No danger," and Rebell chuckled. "Short-handed as we are, I'm taking no chances. Well, did you turn up any gold for Chandos to grab?"

"Not an ounce," and Durant shook his head. "Training's been light the past month. We'll probably have some of the beggars coming over in a few days, more, though. Can't say if they'll bring any dust, of course. They don't get much in these parts."

Rebell was disappointed. He had half suspected that Durant would use the gold from Mangarua as a bait to get him ashore later that night and up to the house, where Beaulieu's outfit would suddenly appear; but evidently not. Some other scheme was in the wind. He resigned himself to watchful waiting.

The four of them chatted, Durant and Rebell alone drinking, while the dinghy with its tow of casks crept over the sunset-reddened water toward the cove where the creek emptied, well to the right. Opposite were the godowns, the huts of the blacks, the house, and the hidden cove behind where Beaulieu's lugger lay. From the trees yonder, Rebell could guess that glasses were focused on the party aboard here.

By the time the boat was lost to sight in its little cover, Bill summoned the party to dinner below. Bill had done himself proud of this dinner, too.

FOR the moment, Rebell was unworried; his sole desire now was to gain some clue to Beaulieu. Unless the latter, or some of his men, were at the house, they could not discern the approach of Rebell's four; those able rascals stood a good chance of looting the chest undetected.

Durant was obviously watching his sister sharply, but seemed satisfied by her carefree gaiety. Her manner gave not the least hint of anything amiss, and Rebell was delighted; with each passing moment he was more fully enthralled by her charm, her poise, her cool ability. As the meal progressed, he noted that Durant was growing a bit nervous, and he probed for the reason, without success.

It was fairly certain, however, that Beaulieu and Durant planned some stroke for this night. Rebell began to regret his self-repression; he always liked to get in the first crack. He had made one mistake in regard to Le Tondeur. Now, perhaps, he had made another in waiting. However, there was time enough to change his tactics, he reflected cheerfully.

Darkness came down upon the sea, the lamps were lighted, the dinghy came bumping alongside. Rebell rose.

"I'll just make sure those blasted men have things in shape," and he excused himself.

On deck, he encountered Louis. "What luck?"

"We've got the chest, sir. Not a soul around the house."

"Put it in the whaleboat, when you get her in the water, and throw a tarp over the chest. Put in rifles, too. Then keep a sharp watch on the shore."

The evening was clear, star-studded, windless.

Rebell, back at the table, frowned offer his coffee and cheroot. With not even a haze over the stars, it would be impossible to get ashore unseen. Oars, or any moving thing, would flash white phosphorescent light in the water. He was checkmated, if he had hoped to

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reach the shore during the dark hours.

Pere Simon and Lyra, fast friends by now, moved into the after-cabin to look at the books and sea trophies there. Rebell paused to finish his coffee. Durant gave him an odd glance and a question, plainly trying to appear casual.

"I can give you a chart of the reefs, unless you got one already from that chap Tondeur."

Rebell nodded negligently, but his brain leaped. Why was this so important? Why was Durant trying to learn if he had a chart? He made careless reply.

"Thanks. Tondeur knew a good deal about the reefs here; he fixed up a chart for me, more or less. I don't know if it's correct. I'd be glad to have you look at it."

"Yes, by all means," Durant said quickly.

"All right. It's in the chart case on deck, not in the locker here. I'll run up and get it. Make yourself comfortable," and Rebell led his guest into the other cabin where Pere Simon was rummaging the bookcase with the girl.

Then he headed for the deck again, a trace of excitement hot in his brain. He had the clue now—at least, he had a clue to his own endeavors, if not those of Beaulieu. The reefs, and the murder of Tondeur by some swimming man. . . . Yes! He could see the whole thing. The tide would be out around midnight, sometime. The way these reefs stuck out of the water at low tide, that altered everything.

All in a moment, the truth widened; he began to grasp things clearly, he even had an inkling of what Beaulieu might be about. Not hard to put himself in that man's place. The flash of understanding, as he headed up the ladder to the deck, showed him in an instant what many words would be needed to explain.

Once on deck, he got the chart Tondeur had made for him, and spoke rapidly with Louis. The whaleboat had already been put into the water alongside.

"Tell Bill to drop everything below and get up here. You know that high-jutting curve of rock fifty yards east? Row over there in the dinghy and tow the whaleboat; leave the whaleboat there, securely moored, and row back. Don't try to hide the flash of the oars; All I want to hide is the whaleboat being there. Then keep a sharp eye on the ridge of reefs to westward, the reefs that curve in toward the shore. Watch the reef passages for any sign of men swimming, and watch the gap at the end of the drying reef, toward the shore."

"I get you," said Louis, a thrill in his voice. "You mean they'd come out by the drying coral, instead of in a boat!"

"Exactly," said Rebell. "Mind, lay the whaleboat by that spiked curve off to the east and behind us—you know the one."

He went below with the chart.

V

THOSE reefs, already beginning to dry as the tide ebbed, were important.

With the tide out, they stuck up on all sides like dark jagged fangs of broken teeth. Only with Durant's labored question about the chart, did Rebell visualize them as they appeared on that chart. Then, almost instantly, the possibilities became apparent.

No one had swum out from shore to murder Tondeur; someone, however, had come out along the broken chain of exposed coral. He had only to swim

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the first gap from shore, and the gaps between the reefs.

Beaulieu, if he wanted to attack the schooner, would follow the same course and arrive at the closest point of the reef, a scant fifty feet distant, unobserved. The swim to the schooner would then be brief—and as she was anchored inside the curve of coral, the approach might well be unseen. Any guards on board would be watching the channels toward the shore, not the reefs to seaward.

Rebell looked down at the chart as Durant inspected it. The penciled jottings of Tondeur stood out now, to his eye, with new clarity. The anchorage, just inside that long curve of shoal, between the reef and the shore, was certainly a danger point at ebb tide. Durant produced pencil and eraser and rubbed at the chart.

"No, no, he's got it wrong here," he observed, and went about correcting it.

Rebell watched, grimly amused, as Durant broke that curving line of reef and made certain changes. It was cleverly done. To believe him, no one could possibly come to the schooner by way of the reef. And Rebell knew that, if he himself had not been alert and probing and seeking some trick, he would have accepted this correction as genuine.

The odd thing, he reflected, was that Durant's very anxiety to keep him from suspecting any such approach, had now given it away.

"There!" Durant finished, gave Rebell an amiable smirk, and returned the chart. "There y'are. If you need to go about the reefs with a boat, you'll be all straight. Look here, what's the hour? Spent a long time over dinner, and we're early birds. I think we'd better be getting back. Oh, look here a moment, Rebell."

With a jerk of his head, he gestured his host into a corner of the cabin. Now it was coming, thought Rebell, as he followed; he waited, grimly amused. Durant spoke in a low voice.

"Anxious to buy any pearls?"

"Sure, if the price is right."

"I'll make it right, for cash," Durant said. "I need a spot o' cash, what with Lyra getting married and all. I've been saving 'em up; about a dozen in all. Three of the babies are fine, not big but with a good rose sheen. The others, ordinary. I'd like to keep the deal quiet, for reasons of my own; but I can trust you. Suppose you come along to the house, now. I'll give you the babies, you bring 'em back and inspect 'em in the morning. I'll give you the lot so cheap you can treble your money at Thursday or Darwin. A hundred pounds for the lot, and you can have three hundred from any trader for the three fine babies alone."

Singular, thought Rebell, how the man baited his trap with an appeal to his own ruling passion; and entirely natural. This shrewd, pig-eyed trader, who had stolen the money of his own sister, who was handing her to Beaulieu in forced marriage in order to cover the theft and prevent questions, took for granted that Rebell would respond to the lure of greed and cupidity.

"Looks good," Rebell said. "Sure. If you aren't scared I'll jerk up the hook and run away with the babies!"

"Oh, I know you," and Durant clapped him on the arm jovially. "We've had our differences, but that's in the past, as you said. I'd trust you anywhere."

The man showed the breaking of a stern tension. He betrayed an enormous relief, a sudden high spirits; and this told Rebell everything.

"Don't be in a rush: wait for an-

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other ten minutes," said Rebell, no hint in his eye or voice of his real triumph and exultation. "I've got some fine old brandy here you might appreciate. Chandos doesn't touch it, and I've had no chance to break it out until now. Miss Durant, may I offer you a thimble of brandy?"

As he spoke, he made a slight gesture of negation, unperceived by Durant.

"Thanks," and the girl smiled, "but I'd rather not, Captain Rebell."

Opening a locker, Rebell produced two small silver cups, apologizing for his lack of brandy glasses—as though any trading schooner would have such things! The bottle followed. A black old bottle, heavily sealed, of really fine brandy. He chipped off the seal—which he himself had applied—and drew the cork, decanting the tawny liquor into the little cups.

He handed one to Durant, took up the other himself, and lifted it.

"How!"

With an appreciative sniff, Durant gulped. Rebell sipped his brandy, then turned suddenly and set it down on the desk.

"Oh, see here, Miss Durant! I wanted to show you something interesting, and nearly forgot it."

He jerked open a drawer and produced a little box. Opening this, he took from a mass of cotton a twin pearl, and laid it in the girl's palm. Her exclamation of delight drew a smile to his lips.

"No, it has no great value, although the color's good. It's a freak; each pearl would be spoiled by cutting the pair apart. Perhaps you'll consent to gratify me by accepting it as a souvenir of the occasion—a wedding present, if you like! Yes, a wedding present, by all means!"

He caught her quick glance, and smiled again as he read her eyes. What with one thing and another, Durant quite failed to note that Rebell did not drink his brandy.

When, some little time later, they went on deck, Durant's tongue was uncertain, and also his step. He seemed to jerk into startled coherence when Rebell, after handing Lyra down into the waiting boat, shook hands with him.

"Eh? You're saying goodnight?" he exclaimed with obvious dismay. "But —but you're coming ashore with us—pearls—three fine babies dirt cheap—"

"Sure, sure, I'll be right along," Rebell exclaimed genially. "Go ahead and get settled in the boat. I'll follow you in no time. Everything's all right."

"Oh, that's all right, then," mumbled Durant, and felt his way over the side.

Rebell chuckled. The four men were in the boat; Louis, the acting mate, was by his side, with Pere Simon. Rebell turned to them.

"Another two minutes, and that blighter will be dead to the world—and he won't wake up till tomorrow. Now," and he gripped the old priest's arm hard, "you'll be glad to know that I've got back your blasted big toe for for you, but it's not aboard here. All I can tell you is that it's safe. Too bad I can't cut and run, but there's Jenkins to think about, and the pearls. All right. You go below and turn in, and whatever happens, keep your mouth shut. Understand?"

"But yes, my friend," said Pere Simon gently. Rebell turned to Louis, as the oarsmen below gave way and the boat moved, with dripping swirls of silver light streaking the water.

"Here's the game, Louis. I was to go ashore with the boat. Beaulieu's waiting there to grab me off, and

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probably the boat as well—that's my guess. The boys will have to take their chances; ten to one, they'll not be able to fight, and won't be hurt. All right. I'm going into action myself. If you go along, it's all a gamble; go or stay here, as you like."

"I go!" said the mulatto gleefully. "You know I'm with you, Cap'n!"

"Then," said Rebell, "strip to shorts and sneaks, with an oilskin-wrapped pistol slung around your waist. Fix up a pistol and belt for me likewise. And rush it."

LOUIS disappeared. Pere Simon spoke softly. "What do you mean to do, *m'sieu?* If you have the relic safe, then—"

"Then I'm not near through," Rebell broke in harshly. "The pearls and that woman are a damned sight more important to me than anything else. You trust me, and I'll bag everything or else go under. I want you to be a meek, mild and silent old chap, and nothing else. So goodnight to you, and remember to keep your mouth shut. If you do, you'll not be hurt even if the worst happens."

With this emphatic but none too polite admonition, he turned away, watching the flashes in the water that marked the progress of the boat toward shore. Presently Louis joined him, handing him a gun belt with bulkily wrapped pistol.

"Boat's almost ashore," he jerked out. "Louis, were the men armed?"

"No rifles; they're in the whaleboat, sir. Just pistols."

"Good! If Beaulieu jumps 'em, they'll have no chance to fight and get killed—"

Sharply staccato voices reached along the water, then a startled yell. A beam of light showed for an instant.

"Jumped 'em!" exclaimed Louis. "Flashlight. Got 'em as they landed."

"And nobody hurt, a good job," said Rebell. "They thought I was along, see? Next step would have been to come out by the reef and jump us. Well, we'll steal a march on them this trip. Come along. You're like a fish in the water, I know."

As he spoke, he was shedding everything but shorts and rubber-soled shoes and belted gun. Louis followed him over the side, down the ladder. They dropped into the water and Rebell struck out for the reef. As the schooner was now between them and the shore, they were safe from any observation.

No one knew better than Rebell how cruel a job lay ahead. By the time he had found footing and pulled his almost naked body up to the reef, he was ripped and gashed in a dozen places by the sharp coral. Ahead of them lay the uneven stretch of the reef, slimy and dripping, chequered by pools, with only the starlight to guide them. Louis, nearly as tough as Rebell, made no complaint but followed gamely.

For half an hour they continued an agonized progress. Swimming the breaks in the reef was nothing; clambering up the coral was plain hell. At length, on the last chunk of exposed reef, they had the shore ahead of them, with a fifty-foot channel to cross and then the welcome beach. Rebell paused, cursing a hole into which he had gone and rubbing a barked shin.

"You spoke about pearls, sir," said Louis in an undertone. "There weren't any in that chest. I looked."

"That's the rub," grumbled Rebell. "Pearls are fragile things. Beaulieu has 'em. Where? Perhaps in his belt; but I wouldn't carry pearls in my belt, unless I had to do it. More like, in some hiding place aboard that lugger

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of his. Well, come on; here's where we take a chance, in case they have anyone watching. Don't splash if you can help it."

He lowered himself into the water, grunted as the salt burned his cuts, and struck out; the mulatto followed him closely. They slid through the darkly starlit water, and with untold relief Rebell felt the shelving sand beneath his feet. The shore beyond, tree-fringed, loomed empty and silent.

Standing in the sand, Rebell squeezed the water from his canvas shoes.

"You know the lay of that hidden cove?" he asked. "The entrance will be well off to the left, around the tip of the island; the cove cuts in back of this shore. I want you to get through the brush to it and find out about the lugger, whether she's careened or in the water, and who's aboard her. Tondeur mentioned that Durant had some old huts and a couple of godowns there, so be careful. Beaulieu and his men must have been camped there."

"Right, sir. Where'll I meet you?"

Rebell ruminated aloud. "Hm! If I'm right in my theory, Beaulieu's crew will be coming along here to go out and grab our lugger and us, any time now. He may send his mate to do the job. He'll be badly put out at not having grabbed me, and at finding Durant drugged and useless. Let's see: He'd probably first make sure of our men, then send his outfit to seize our lugger. He'd stop up at the house with Durant and his sister— Here, come up to the trees and wait. Sounds like voices now."

They passed up to the mangroves, and slid in among the twisted roots.

VOICES, sure enough, A dark blotch of men moving along the white beach toward them, with soft speech hushed by an angry order. They passed within ten feet of the two hidden men, paused at the channel, then one by one they took off and swam to the reef. To see them in any detail was impossible, but Rebell thought Beaulieu was not among them. In this, Louis concurred.

"I counted nine, sir."

"Same here." Rebell thrilled. "By the lord, that's his mate and crew of eight! He's alone here. Good thing we waited. You hop to the lagoon or cove or whatever it is. You may find Jenkins there, may find all our men tied up. Anyhow, go aboard his lugger and lie doggo for some word from me. I'll go settle with Beaulieu when he least expects it, blast him! Run along."

"You're not letting 'em grab our lugger, sir?"

"I am," said Rebell grimly. "Never mind; we'll come out all right."

The mulatto started away through the trees, and was lost to sight. Rebell hit out along the edge of the beach, toward the cove where the godowns and the house lay. He could see or hear nothing of the men on the reef; they were moving cautiously.

Rebell was exultant, confident, assured. Now he had Beaulieu where he wanted him—Durant also. The whaleboat was moored and securely hidden on the seaward side of the coral islet and reef, beyond the other side of the schooner; even at high tide, that coral jag would hide her from sight of the shore. The gold was safe in her. And now everything pointed to a quick and savage clean up. It would be savage, no question about that; Beaulieu was the kind to start shooting, even with a gun trained on him.

"Too bad I can't shoot him down at sight!" muttered Rebell. "That'd be the way to do it. That'd be the safe,

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ship-shape way; but it's not my way, blast it. Too much like murder—like his style of doing things. I don't want to have to look into that girl's eyes and feel like a yellow dog. I'm going to be a new man from this time on, if she says the word!"

He was, in short, in a glorious mood, with victory in sight. He had prepared against the worst; but no need of that now!

VI

FLOATING in from the water, breaking with silvery voice athwart the half-sensed vibratory roll of the surf, floated the note of a bell. Three—four—five in all; five bells, ten thirty o'clock, struck aboard Rebell's schooner.

Rebell heard the sound and paused, slack-jawed, staring out at the faintly iridescent reefs and the invisible lugger. Who had struck that bell? Oh, of course; his mental query received instant reply. Pere Simon, naturally. No one else eboard to do it. He remembered now that the old priest had been irritated because Rebell did not bother half the time to strike the ship's bell.

The sound drifted in upon two others, in the big main room of Durant's bungalow. Durant himself lay on a rattan home-made couch, snoring monotonously. His sister stood, strained and pallid of face, staring at Beaulieu with panic in her eyes. She stood, as though by accident, in front of a native shield and weapons arranged on the filmsy wall.

Beaulieu's words had gone into her like knives; merciless, brutal words such as she had never dreamed. He had answered her angry outburst by telling her how he meant to break her spirit. This explanation was the first move in his program, and it left her shocked and horrified beyond speech. Beaulieu laughed softly as he watched her.

He sat in Durant's big cane chair, before Durant's desk, a half-smoked cheroot in his hand, a big Dutch cheroot, whitish and loathsome to the eye. He was freshly shaved and dressed; his spotless whites intensified his darkly handsome features and the cruel glint in his eyes. He was quite calm, quite cold, a little amused by the girl's horror. Already her contempt of him had vanished—she was afraid now.

A slight smile curving his thin lips, Beaulieu put the cheroot between his teeth and nodded.

"Snatch one of those native daggers if you like," he said. "It'd only make me take it away from you; never mind any more talk of killing me or yourself, my dear. It's not done. You'll soon get past that hysterical stage of things, and if you make up your mind to it, you'll find me a very pleasant husband."

"You beast!" she said in a slow, deliberate voice.

Beaulieu chuckled. "Yes, women always say that, until they learn that they've a little of the beast in 'em at times, too. That is, women like you. You take the natives, and they know better. No pretense about them. No, you're going to be glad to marry me when that trading schooner comes along. I'm taking you to Port Moresby on Rebell's lugger, as I've explained; but we'll not be there long, and you'll not go ashore."

Her staring eyes struck past him, touched upon the doorway, and then dropped.

"I don't know," she said confusedly, flushing suddenly. "You're not taking Captain Rebell?"

Beaulieu puffed for a moment.

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"No, my dear; he stays here with his men, quite safe and sound, but I use his name at Port Moresby, where I sell certain objects of value at a very small price. Rebell will have a hard time explaining later that he didn't sell them. They're some church ornaments that you don't know about yet, my dear."

"Your mistake, she knows all about them," said Rebell from the open doorway, at one side and a little behind Beaulieu. "Keep your hands as they are."

Beaulieu did not move or speak; but his dark face flushed more deeply dark, and the devil sprang in his eyes. Rebell, understanding a good deal from what he had just overheard, came a step into the room.

"Clever boy, aren't you?" he went on. "Thinking you'd lay the blame of that Mangarua business on me, walk off with my lugger, and disappear. Well, it won't be done. You made one big mistake, Beaulieu, when you just put the old priest on a reef and left him to die. He didn't die. He put me on your trail, so that's that."

Beaulieu turned now, not rapidly, and looked at Rebell, naked to the waist and streaked with dried salt, smeared with watery blood from his cuts. No nice figure.

The watching girl said nothing; she shrank against the wall, staring. Both men ignored her. Between them was something terrible and vivid that fairly filled the whole room—a hatred, a mutual tense feeling that blazed from them and burned everything else away. Rebell held a pistol in his hand, close against his body.

"Quite a surprise." Beaulieu's voice was ugly with repressed feeling. "So it's necessary to change my plans, is it?"

"Considerably," and Rebell's laugh was given the lie by his eyes, narrowed and deadly. He came a step closer, until he was almost beside Beaulieu's chair. "Now, Miss Durant, see if the gentleman has a belt under his clothes —a belt like mine. And go through his pockets. Let's turn out the Mangarua pearls."

Rebell's belt was evidently under his wet shorts. The girl moved, and wakened. She went to Beaulieu's side. He lifted his hands, but never took his steady gaze of hatred from the face of Rebell. Distastefully, she performed her duty, found nothing.

"The pearls are aboard my schooner," said Beaulieu. "Where you won't find them."

"I'm glad that's settled, then," Rebell observed. "Where's your gun?"

"I have none, as Miss Durant's just discovered."

"You lie!" cracked out Rebell. "You were never known to be without one. She just didn't find it, eh? Well, I'll find it. Stand up!"

Beaulieu did not move. "I tell you—"

"Stand up!" Rebell's voice was electric with hidden fury. He made no threat, but his eyes were eloquent of murder; his pistol quivered slightly. Under that terrific implication, which left no doubt of his intent, Beaulieu stirred and came out of his chair.

The tension was past bearing. A cry burst from the girl; she flung herself forward between them, catching at Rebell's arm.

"No, you mustn't do that—no, no!" her voice came wildly. "No, not murder—"

BEAULIEU moved like a flash, as though steel springs had uncoiled within him. Frantically, Rebell tried to tear himself loose, tried to thrust the

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girl aside, but he was too slow. A little pistol seemed to leap into Beaulieu's hand. It cracked out and then cracked again; puny explosions, apparently, yet they did the work.

The first bullet actually tore at the girl's dress; Rebel's pistol fell, blood spurted over his fingers. The second jerked his head up. A look of amazement came into his face, blood started on his forehead, and he crumpled up on the floor an inert mass.

Beaulieu lowered his little pistol, with a sardonic grimace. Lyra was staring down at Rebell; now she looked up, horror in her eyes.

"Thank you, my dear, thank you," said Beaulieu calmly, but with cutting sarcasm. "You did me a very good turn; I'll remember it."

"Oh!" Her inarticulate cry was stifled, muffled, as she realized what her action had effected. She was ashen to the lips. "You—you've killed him—"

"No, far from it," Beaulieu said coolly. "That bullet would scarcely penetrate his skull; merely grazed his head. The other, I grant, did its work better. However, I've no intention of killing him, much as he deserves it, so rest assured. In fact, strange as it may seem, I think we'll accomplish our business here without killing anyone. Rebell was a bit too smart for your brother, but now he's scotched for good. Hello! What's this?"

He looked up, as the house shook to the tread of feet. From the water, two shots came in above the roll of surf—signal that Rebell's schooner was taken. Almost with the sound, three figures shoved in at the door.

Between two armed men, Louis the mulatto was shoved into the room. His wrists were tied together, blood was smeared on his face. At sight of Rebell, he uttered an oath and stood frozen.

"Caught him over by the lagoon, sir," said one of the two captors. "Never suspected anything till we copped him."

Beaulieu surveyed the prisoner with cool interest.

"Apparently Rebell knew more than I gave him credit for, eh? Well, he didn't know I had a couple of extra hands; that's a good joke on him. Jem, take this blasted rat over to the lagoon godown with the others; tie him up like them, good and hard, then come back here. Driscoll, go down and scull out that dinghy to the schooner. Four of the men can fetch the boat back, with that old duffer of a Frenchman, and we'll make a clean sweep of all hands there. Skip along, you!"

As the two men dragged Louis out, Beaulieu turned to Lyra Durant.

"My dear, why don't you get busy? Bandage Rebell's hand; I don't want him to bleed to death."

The girl started, and hurried into the first bedroom. Beaulieu turned over the limp figure with his foot, so that Rebell lay face upward. He took up the fallen pistol, then leaned forward and worked at the belt under Rebell's shorts until it came clear. Resuming his seat, he inspected the contents of the belt, while Lyra knelt and worked over Rebell's bleeding and broken hand. He laid it aside with a complacent word.

"Not a bad haul of itself! I think we'll just strip Rebell clean while we're about it," he observed. "You're making a good job of that bandage, my dear. So you know all about the Mangarua business, eh? Another reason to marry you in a hurry, so you can't talk. Hm! Now we must change all our plans, since that old priest is still alive. Your brother and I must get out of these seas in a hurry. We'd best scuttle my

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lugger, take Rebell's craft, and head for the first Dutch port, where we can disappear—and you with us, my dear. Must stick to your husband, you know."

He laughed shortly, came to his feet, and began to stride up and down the room. The ministrations of the girl did not rouse Rebell. Beaulieu turned to him, stooped, and examined the head wound.

"Bah! A mere graze, as I said. Oh, it's you, eh?" He glanced up, as the man Jem came into the room. "Stand by. When the boat gets back, we'll take this chap down to it and go aboard his lugger. You'll come back here and keep this lady under your eye. My dear, perhaps you'd better go to bed—yes, that'll be best. Go into your own room. I'll lock the door so you'll be safe, and Jem, here, will take good care you don't go out the window. You might stay under her window, Jem, so she won't be afraid or have bad dreams."

The man grinned. The girl, who could do nothing more for Rebell, seemed about to break down; then, under Beaulieu's bitter gaze, she hardened and without a word marched into her room. Beaulieu turned the key in the lock.

"If she gets away, Jem, I'll keelhaul you—so help me!"

Jem's grin vanished and he looked startled.

"Never fear, sir; she'll stay tight."

VII

BULLY REBELL had a vague memory of seeing Pere Simon brought ashore and led off into the darkness, by a couple of men who carried lanterns. The little old man was speaking French volubly, and nobody bothered to answer him, for nobody understood what he said. In fact, his captors were vastly amused by his aspect. Beaulieu gave him only a curious glance and turned away.

Rebell mounted from the boat to the deck of his own schooner. His right hand hurt damnably, and Beaulieu had contrived a sling out of a kerchief; the bullet, he told Rebell, had broken a bone or two but had gone clean through the hand. Obviously Rebell was out of it, so far as any action was concerned—and Rebell himself knew it only too bitterly.

The men clustered on his deck regarded him with curiosity and interest. Beaulieu spoke to his mate, and had Rebell marched down into the cabin, whose transom was still open. Glancing around, Rebell saw that the bottle of drugged brandy had vanished from sight; the cabin had apparently been hastily looted. Beaulieu took out a cheroot, lighted it, and dropped into a chair.

"Go topside," he told the two guards, "and pass the word that all looted articles are to be returned here. Stay gone till I send for you. There should be a whaleboat aboard. Get it in the water."

"There ain't none, sir," said one of the men. Beaulieu looked at Rebell.

"Mean to say you've nothing but a dinghy?"

Rebell laughed. "At present, yes. Lost the whaleboat coming here."

"Then let me know when the dinghy comes back," and Beaulieu dismissed his men. He produced another cheroot, handed it to Rebell, and struck a match for the latter. "Don't try anything," he cautioned. "You may hope to lick me with one hand, but you know better. And I'll have to shoot you again."

"Wouldn't you like the excuse?" Rebell demanded drily.

"No." Beaulieu gave him a direct

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look. "I don't want any killing now."

"You've changed. Haven't got converted, by any chance?"

Beaulieu shot him a savage glance. "I'm playing safe, that's all. Nothing I'd like better than to put a bullet into you. In fact, I had meant to hang you if I got you. Here, sit down and be comfortable."

"Thanks," said Rebell with sarcasm. He went to the chair before his desk, and lowered himself into it.

The very hatred that existed between these two men, lent each of them a certain respect for the other. The first blaze of animosity had passed, had emptied itself in their brief conflict. Now Beaulieu spoke without heat or passion, as to an equal, and Rebell soon comprehended the motives of his enemy.

"Wouldn't give me any satisfaction to kill you now, in cold blood," Beaulieu said frankly. "I tried, and failed; that toy pistol did its work, however. What you told me has changed everything—is that old priest really alive? He must be, of course, or you'd not know about the Mangarua business."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Rebell. "A Japanese pearler picked him up, and brought him to Thursday Island. I was there and he hired me to go after you. He wants his gold and relics and offered me the pearls."

Beaulieu smiled thinly. "So? Well, there was killing, and that raid won't be forgiven. It'll raise hell, in fact, as soon as it gets known. Durant and I had better skip; besides, there's Lyra. Yes, best to get away without any more killing. Bad as you are, the law might still consider it murder."

Rebell chuckled, then his brows drew down savagely.

"I don't murder anybody, Beaulieu." he said slowly. "I don't kill without any warning. Now, I'm warning you. Licked me, have you? All right. I'm going to kill you, mind that, and I'm going to do it at the first chance, without further warning."

"You would, if you could, of course." Beaulieu nodded, and tapped the pistol he had slid into his lap. Those slow, deliberate words of Rebell's had been ominous. "You won't be in any shape to do it for a long while; I'll see to that."

"Maybe you think so," countered Rebell. "You and your outfit deserve anything you get. Mangarua was only one time. You've raided other places. You've killed and robbed, and you've done it so cleverly that the law has never caught up with you. But you'll pay—all of you."

Beaulieu inspected him coolly. "Now you've got that off your chest, Rebell, let's talk sense. I've got your money, in that belt. Kind of you to have it all handy for me. None of your men are hurt to speak of; they're tied up in Durant's godown, on the hidden cove back of the house. As I say, I don't intend to kill you. I'd sooner make sure you suffer like hell."

"Sounds more natural, coming from you," snarled Rebell. "What's your game?"

"Safety." Beaulieu emitted a cloud of smoke as he replied. "You're staying here, with your outfit. I'm leaving in the morning in this lugger of yours, after scuttling my own schooner and burning the house and godowns. You'll be marooned."

Rebell stared blankly for an instant. "Why, you rat!" he exploded violently. "Burn the buildings? You know what that'll mean. The blacks will be over from the mainland in no time, at seeing the smoke! You might as well shoot us and have done with it!"

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BEAULIEU'S thin smile was acid. "Especially if you have no food and no arms, eh? Well, that's what I'm going to do. But I'll leave you two rifles, a hundred cartridges, and some food—on one condition. That means, a fighting chance for life until the trading schooner comes along in a week or two." He paused, inspecting the furious Rebell contemplatively. "It's up to you. If you want that fighting chance for life, say the word. If you don't, I'll be just as well satisfied."

Rebell glared at him, knowing all too well that two rifles and a little food might make all the difference—and might not. At sight of the burning station, a torrent of savages would be over from the mainland, blacks who could only be deterred from murder and head-lifting by armed intimidation. To all intents, Beaulieu might as well shoot his victims before leaving.

In just such clever fashion, Rebell knew, more than one such job had been engineered by Beaulieu. The man had an infernal gift for such work, with no one left to tell tales. In the case of Pere Simon, luck had been against him when that Japanese lugger picked the old priest off the reef. No such luck could be expected here.

"Blast you!" muttered Rebell thickly. "What's your condition?"

"Give me a bill of sale for this schooner and its contents. here and now," said Beaulieu coolly. "Not that I need it, perhaps; but it'll help me to disappear with no questions asked, and get a bit of cash by selling the lugger."

Rebell laid down his cheroot on the edge of the desk, and passed his good hand across his eyes. He was not nearly so furious as he seemed; inwardly, he had settled into a cold and savage determination. He knew the worst now —sentence of death was passed upon himself and all his men. Their heads would be smoked in Papuan lodge-fires. He had gone into a merciless game with his eyes open, and there was no mercy now that he had lost.

"All right," he grunted abruptly. "You'll have to write it. I can sign with my left hand."

"And two of the men can witness it." Beaulieu nodded. "The paper will make things easier for me. I'll keep my word about the grub and rifles, never fear."

"I'm not worried," said Rebell, and picked up his cheroot again, puffed at it.

Beaulieu took paper and a pen from the desk, sat down at one side, and scrawled a few lines. On the deck above, voices broke out; the men were bawling something. He called, and two of them came down.

"What's up?"

"Boat's coming out, sir," said one of the two. "They hailed us that the old Frenchman got away in the brush."

"Let him go, then. We're leaving at daybreak. Here, I want you two men to witness Rebell's signature to this paper."

He spread the paper on the desk. Rebell took the pen in his left hand and with no little trouble, signed his name. The two men signed.

"I'll be going ashore with Rebell in a few minutes," said Beaulieu. "Keep the boat ready, when she comes out."

The two departed on deck. Rebell, puffing at her cheroot, leaned back in his chair as Beaulieu folded and pocketed the bill of sale.

"Satisfied now, are you?" he asked.

"Quite, thanks. By the way, have you any dynamite aboard? I'll need some, to get rid of my lugger properly and quickly."

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Rebell broke into a harsh, discordant laugh.

"Yes. There's a nearly full box of it, down in the lazaret. You're welcome to it," he said, and laughed again. Beaulieu frowned at him.

"What's the joke?"

"Oh, my notion of a joke wouldn't amuse you." Rebell yawned and stretched. He knocked the ash from his cheroot, puffed a cloud of smoke from it, and then took it from his lips. "By the way, there's a little wall safe back of that last panel, but it won't trouble you. The combination's been broken for years."

Beaulieu glanced at the paneled wall. Rebell, with the smoke eddying around him, pressed the glowing end of his cheroot firmly against the little black point on the locker door beside him. There was a faint, sharp hiss, and he came to his feet.

"Well, I'm for the deck and the open air," he said. "No chance of your leaving us one of Durant's boats, is there?"

"Not a chance," Beaulieu said firmly, his eyes cruel and hard. "Not a shred of a chance, Rebell."

Rebell nodded. "Come along then," he said.

Unhurried, he started into the passage and up the ladder, with Beaulieu coming after him. On reaching the deck, Rebell took his hurt hand from the sling and grimaced at the stab of pain. The men were grouped about the deck and unconcernedly he passed through them to the seaward rail. Beaulieu halted to look toward shore, where the boat was drawing alongside.

With one glance, Rebell was on the rail. A startled cry went up at his movement—then he was over, leaping hard and far, diving for the water.

He struck, went deep, and began to swim frantically. A gasp broke from him at the pain, but he stayed under as long as possible. When at length he broke the surface, he heard an outburst of voices, Beaulieu ordering the boat to go after him, someone else shouting that he was swimming to seaward. So he was, indeed. A shot rang out, and the bullet did not miss him by far.

He ducked again. With every bit of energy in him, he ploughed through the water toward the jagged little islet to the eastward, behind which the whaleboat was moored. Another shot, and again he ducked, holding his breath, staying under—

Then the shock hit him, nearly bursting his eardrums. Luckily, dynamite expands itself downward, not sideways. Even so, it left him practically senseless.

SOMETHING like an hour later, Rebell was slowly sculling the whaleboat toward the shore, slowly and painfully. Wreckage was everywhere, but no voices lifted from the water.

A current had carried him past the house, on into the cove where the creek emptied; and he could not prevail against it. He was too weak. He had seen a boat put out from shore, one of Durant's boats; he had heard his name called; he could make no effectual reply. His voice was weak, blood was in his throat, his brain was in a haze.

Unseen, unheard, he came into the silent cove and the whaleboat gritted on the coral sand. He staggered ashore and tried to pull up the boat. He could not budge it. No matter, however. The tide was on the flood now; the boat was safe enough here.

He stumbled through the brush, toward the house, and checked himself,

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listening. Close by, someone was sobbing—tearing, rending sobs. He started toward the sound, and at the close approach it ended in a gasp of alarm, and a voice.

"Who—who's that?"

"Me," said Rebell, reaching out through the scrub. "Oh, it's you! What are you crying about?"

She was clinging to him in a sudden ecstatic burst of emotion, almost before he realized it—warm and vibrant, holding him close, incredulous and still sobbing.

"There, now, it's all right," he said, and patted her shoulder. "What's happened anyhow? What are you off here in the bush for?"

"They—they said you must have gone with—with the schooner," she gasped, between tears and laughter. "Pere Simon let the men loose. Louis is in charge now. Beaulieu's guards didn't even try to fight. I came out here to be by myself—"

"And here I am," said Rebell, gathering his forces. "Lord, I'm done up! When that dynamite went off, it must have busted something inside of me. Oh, well, that'll heal; I'm tough. Say, this is the place I met you this morning—remember!"

"Of course I do. That's why I came here." In the starlight, he was aware of her face lifting toward him. "I'm ready now, I think."

"Eh?" He frowned, and then choked down a grunt of pain as his hurt hand touched her. "Ready? What do you mean? Oh, you want to come along to the house—"

"No, no." She was laughing now, certainly, even if the laughter was a bit wild. "Don't you remember? And I've got your present safe—the twin pearl. Your wedding present. And I'm ready now—for—for—"

It burst suddenly on Rebell. He caught her in his hurt arm, and never felt the pain, and a quick, eager laugh broke from his lips. Then the laugh passed.

"I'll do my best to be worth it!" he said gravely. "And we've got Pere Simon here—"

"You're making me wait a long time for that second kiss," she breathed.

He took her in his arms.

Pigeon's Progress

TWO years ago, Lee S. Crandall, curator of birds at the Bronx Park Zoological Gardens, gave a blue hen-pigeon to a man who lives in Utica, N. Y. Recently, Mr. Crandall, on an inspection tour of the pheasant building, observed a blue hen-pigeon trying to get in. Mr. Crandall remembered that about two years before he had kept some pigeons in there. Well—it seems this pigeon that was trying to get in with the pheasants was the one he had given to the man in Utica. The man in Utica said he had given the bird a happy home and had kept it pretty closely confined since he had brought it from the Bronx. He seemed a little amazed to hear that the blue hen preferred the Bronx Zoological Gardens to Utica.

All this, Mr. Crandall thinks, proves that pigeons have a memory; they may even suffer from nostalgia.

—*Jon T. Charles.*

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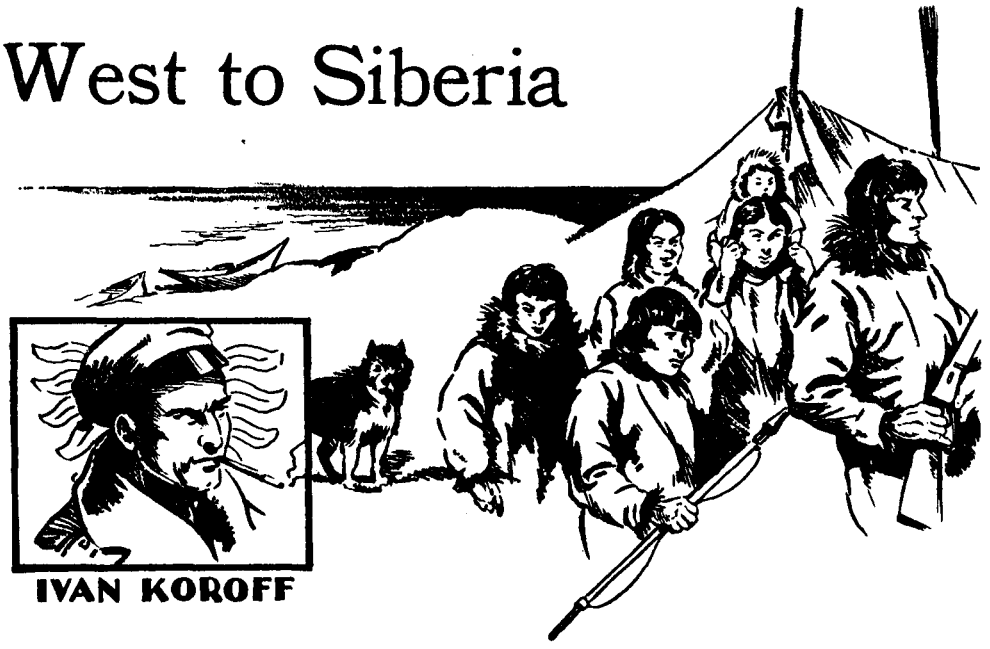
West to Siberia



By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Sable," "Trail's End," etc.

A Complete No-Shirt McGee Novelet

I

ALL THIS happened before folks started callin' me No-Shirt McGee. In them days I was young and full of vinegar and my eyesight was so good I could spot a squaw in a blueberry patch three miles away. I'd come over the Chilkoot Pass with the rest of the boys and floated down the Yukon to Dawson. But there must've been a musty Eskimo curse on me because I couldn't seem to hit paydirt. All I ever staked was hungry ground.

Bein' a gent who follows the line of least resistance, it was easier for me to drift down the Yukon to the Berin' Sea, than to buck the stream. At the Scales, which was a place where packers kinda got organized before packin' outfits over the pass, I meets a rooster that looked as if life had yanked out most of his tail feathers.

He was a deceivin'-lookin' cuss. He stood about six feet and had long legs and a short back and he'd have made a good packer, I was thinkin', if he'd had a little more meat on his bones. He couldn't've weighed more'n a hundred and thutty pounds. He had a cough and his face was white and his hands soft from office work of some kind, and believed in calculation instead of luck.

In them days, as now, nicknames was sometimes downright insultin' and sometimes cruel. I got mine because I liked to work without a shirt. An educated Yukon Indian takes a look at this rooster and wants to know if he's one of the palefaces he'd read about

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in stories of the Indian Wars on the plains.

Everybody started callin' him Pale-Face and I don't suppose one stampeder in a hundred knowed his rear name was Steve Mulcahy. Yeah, you're right, he was Irish. He had black hair and blue eyes and the combination made his face look paler than it really was. Locked up in his sickly body was iron courage, and he had more claws than a wildcat.

Me and him decided to go pardners as far as Dawson, and I learned he was nearly thutty years old, done office work, and was in love. That's quite a handicap for a man to pack on a stampede. But this weren't no puppy love. It'd been goin' on ten years. The girl's name was Elsie Lane, and she was two years younger'n him.

He had a sickly ma and pa to support, along with a lot of younger brothers and sisters. It seemed like the old folks kept right along bein' blessed with kids even if they was sickly. May be that's what made 'em sick. I know another mouth to feed every year or so would get me down if I was sickly. Pale-Face was the only support. And just to show you how fate works, he had to fall in love with Elsie who was lookin' after her mother and seven kids. Her mother was a widder woman and had asthma. It was all she could do to drag one foot after the other.

When Elsie come home nights from the factory where she worked she had to roll up her sleeves and pitch into mendin' and housework. I'm tellin' you all this so you'll know why Pale-Face and Elsie couldn't get married. They'd laid up a nest egg again' the happy day, but it didn't look as if they'd ever have a chance

"Jes' plain prospectin's tough enough," proclaims the mighty No-Shirt, "'thout havin' Roossian gunboats saltin' yore mine o' misfortunes."

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to use it. Then Carmack strikes gold on the Klondike and the rush is on. The two of 'em talked it over. She figgered she could keep both pots boilin' if he pulled his freight for the diggin's and he said, even if he didn't know nothin' about frontier life he'd get through some way. So he takes the nest egg and heads for Seattle.

It takes a set-up like that to put a burr under a man and make him keep goin' when Fate has stacked the cards again' him and his fellow man ain't doin' anything to help him along.

As the days passed and me and Pale-Face drifts down the Yukon you could see him pick up color and weight. For awhile I done most of the work, but little by little he took over his share. Fresh air, work and moose steaks worked miracles in the cuss.

WHEN we found the Klondike couldn't do us no good we went on down the river. There was talk about gold in the Nome country. It seems some professor shark took a look at the rollin' tundra and figgered there had been several beach lines as the ground slowly lifted durin' the ages. He predicted gold would be found on each. Nobody paid him any attention. What'd a prof know about gold minin' anyway? Then some cuss hits her, provin' the prof knowed his onions as the feller says.

Me and Pale-Face hits the Nome country too late. There's a fleet of ships off the shore, and there's miles of freight that'd been lightered through the surf to the beach, but there ain't no worthwhile ground for Pale-Face Mulcahy and No-Shirt McGee.

While we're talkin' things over Pale-Face gets letters from home. There's one from Elsie sayin' everything at home is hunky-dory, and another from a close friend who says the girl is workin' herself to skin and bones and unless he finds gold in a hurry Elsie's friends will be takin' up collections for funeral flowers.

I hear him say, "Poor little kid," and there's a mist in his eyes, then they suddenly harden and he looks across the Berin' Sea in the general direction of Siberia. "Listen, McGee," he says, "we've got to beat this game. I can't let that girl down."

"If I had any money," I answers, "you could have it."

"I know it," he says, "and I thank you. Now get this. The professor who said they'd find gold on the Nome beach lines, also said the same thing was true along the Siberian Coast. To me it means finding gold is calculation, not luck. What does that mean to you?"

"Not a thing," I answers, "I know a cuss that went over there prospectin' and all he found was great gobs of grief. Them Russians don't like Americans takin' their gold."

"Then why don't they pan it themselves?" he argues.

"I don't know anything about that," I answers, "you'll have to ask the Russians. It's a wild country over there. Even the Eskimos are different. Ask any of our Eskimos, and they'll tell you they're bad. The Russians have a gunboat or two, hangin' 'round. What chance have you got again' a gunboat?"

"Knowing what Elsie is up against," he answers, "I'll take my chances on a gunboat." He pats his thirty-thirty rifle. "If I could meet 'em ashore, I ain't sure but what I could whip a gunboat's crew single handed. Sailors are lousy shots. Just the same, McGee, I'm going to take a chance."

I could see he was wantin' me to

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throw in with him so I says, "When do we start?"

We inquires around and learns there weren't no great obstacles to overcome. There's a Russian consul in camp and he gives us a permit to trap and prospect. When we told the boys what a cinch it was to get a permit they warned us there was a catch. "They let you find the gold," one of them says, "and then they confiscate it. If you start hollerin' they charge you with violatin' some law and from then on you get a bellyful of minin'—in the Siberian salt mines."

A couple of days before we was set to start, I et somethin' out of a can that laid me low. I didn't care whether I lived or died. The doctor helped a lot, too. He stepped outside of our tent and says to Pale-Face, "You'd better go. If you miss your schooner, you'll miss a season. There won't be another trading boat leaving for the Siberian Coast this season. We will see that McGee's relatives are notified and that he is given a decent funeral."

Then Pale-Face comes into the tent and he is wearin' a poker face. "S'long, old son," he says brightly, "I can't take a chance of missing the schooner because of Elsie, the folks and all of the kids down in the States. You're looking fine. Doc tells me you'll be on your feet in three or four days."

I'm wonderin' if they plan to bury me standin' up. That's the only way I can figger to be on my feet. "Now, old man," he says with more affection than I'd ever seen him show, "don't let this floor you. And say, if you have any extra money send it to Elsie. I'll double anything you send when I come back from Siberia."

"All right," I says between gasps of pain, "but if you try payin' me any interest I'll shoot you."

II

I CROSSED the doctor up by gettin' well three weeks later. But I was kinda weak, so I got a job in a hash-house with room-and-board throwed in. Every time a steamer left for Outside I'd send money to Elsie, tellin' her I was doin' it for Pale-Face. If I hadn't done that, it'd have gone for hellin' around anyway.

The summer passes, but there's no word of Pale-Face Mulcahy until early fall. Just before the ice comes down from the Arctic there's the devil to pay in camp. Doc comes runnin' to me. "Pale-Face is back," he says, "and he's crazier'n a loon. They're tryin' to catch him now."

I ran out of the hash-house and saw a mob chasin' a scarecrow of a man who was high-tailin' it over the tundra. I figgered he'd circle and cut across country with the idear of headin' him off. It was Pale-Face, but you couldn't see much face. It was covered with a spade beard, which same was plenty dirty, and what face there was showin' wasn't pale.

"Steve!" I yells. "Steve!"

He looks at me with kinda glazed eyes and don't answer. "I'll beat 'em yet," he yelps at the mob. "Those Russians can't have my gold. I'll beat 'em." I figgers the Russians must've run him ragged. He's faster and tougher than any miler you ever saw at a track meet. He's more like a quarter-miler who can do a mile at quarter-mile speed.

He swings away from me and starts crossin' a creek. Somebody's dropped a plank over the narrowest and deepest part and when Pale-Face is halfway across, the plank busts in two. Down he goes and when the foam drifts away I can see him standin' on the bottom with his head four feet below the sur-

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face. He's threshin' about with his arms, but he ain't comin' up.

I grabs a rope with my left hand, jumps in and wraps my right arm about him. The boys haul away and we come to the surface. I tries to pack him as soon as my feet hit bottom, but man alive, the cuss is heavy. And yet he's mostly skin, bones and muscle. It don't make sense.

A man gets hold of his shoulders, I pack his feet and we stagger ashore. The water's about two degrees above freezin' and the air's colder. But we don't think about that. We're thinkin' about Pale-Face's weight. "He must be loaded with gold," the other cuss gasps. "Nothin' else weighs that much."

We go to the nearest cabin, where there's a red-hot Yukon stove, and strip. The Doc has got there and is emptyin' the water from Pale-Face. I picks up his parka, and gets muscle cramp from the weight. It's the kind of a parka the Eskimos and some whites wear, with the fur turned in, and the outside covered with denim. Only he's been wearin' it with the denim side in.

I investigates and what do I find? It's loaded with little pockets and each is filled with fine gold. It's the same way with his pants. There's fifty pounds of it, if there's a ounce.

"Good gosh!" Doc exclaims, "no wonder he sank."

He's kinda out of his head the next forty-eight hours, but when he comes to I'm settin' beside his bunk. It takes him some time to figger things out. "Hello, McGee," he says, and his voice is kinda relieved. "I've been through hell. Had to sail from Siberia alone. Got caught in the ice. I've been missin' meals, too. Lived on seal oil. Ever taste seal oil?"

"Nope," I answers.

"Taste it. After that you can taste *anything* without gagging," he answers. "You got the gold. It was sewed up in my parka and pants."

"Yeah, I got it," I answers, "and shipped it out on the senator to the assay office in Seattle. She may be the last ship out this Winter. I wrote to assay office to send the money to Elsie. I told her to doll up next spring and meet you here, if you didn't come out over the winter trail."

"McGee," he says, "you're a mind-reader. Listen, old son, I struck it. Those Russians are fur trappers and traders. It seems like they don't take naturally to mining. But they try to take the clean-up from American miners after they strike it. I prospected on what must've been the third beach-line over there. The gold had gathered in a low place. Had to thaw, but there was plenty of driftwood."

"Yeah, I know, it comes down on the big rivers emptyin' into the Arctic," I says.

"I didn't like the look of things," he continues. "Too much snoopin' around. Sometimes it was Eskimos, sometimes Russian trappers. They knew I was taking out money, but they didn't know how much."

"How much?" I asks.

"Six thousand ounces in two months," he answers. "Besides what I sewed up in my parka. I knew they were just waiting until I started out, then they intended swooping down. I fooled 'em and buried it. We're going back after it next summer."

"Did they try to take it?"

"Sure! A trader wanted to buy everything I took out, and I showed 'em a hundred ounces," Pale-Face explains. "What I saw in their eyes was the tip-off. They bought it, and when

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I headed for Nome in an *umiak,* a trader with an official aboard overhauled me. He was all set to confiscate everything I'd taken, claiming I owed the government a tax. Also I'd disobeyed the law covering tax evasion. What saved me, was I didn't have any. They arrested me anyway, but fixed it so I would escape."

"I see," I says, "they figgers you'd go to your cache, pick it up, then head for the American Coast."

"But I didn't do that," he explains. "I made 'em think I done it, reasoning if I got away, they'd think I had the gold with me, and would forget all about it and it would be easier for me to take it out next Summer. If they caught me, well, I didn't have the goods, so they might think there wasn't any cache after all. The devils ran me ragged and I was crazy when I saw Nome comin' over the horizon."

"You sure was," I agrees. "Let's see, six thousand ounces, makin' allowance for impurities, black sand and such should figure around fifteen dollars an ounce. That's ninety thousand dollars."

"Just about," he says, "and it's worth risking a life term in the salt mines to bring out." I could see he was thinkin' what he could do for his folks, Elsie's folks and the kids.

"It means," he says, breakin' a long silence, "the whole works can get out of the slums, into the country where there's fresh air. They can take care of themselves and give Elsie and me a chance to grab a little happiness on our own account. Do you know, McGee, in the ten years we've been engaged, I haven't heard her complain once of the load she was carrying."

"And that isn't all, Steve," I answers, "I never heard you kick. And that's the reason why I'll help you get that gold out if you want me to."

"I was hoping you'd say that," he says. "But I think you should know this. Those Russians are no fools. They are liable to be waiting for me next Summer."

And that's just the way it turned out. A slim Russian who could speak English showed up durin' the winter and he learned two things. First, I'd shipped out fifty pounds of gold and I was Pale-Face Mulcahy's pardner. Next, he found out we was livin' on the fat of the land. And it cost plenty to live on the fat of the land at Nome in them days.

He didn't come near us and after awhile he disappeared. His name was Ivan Koroff and while he was there he made a hit with the dance-hall girls by bowin' from the waist and clickin' his heels together when he saluted. That salute was a tip-off. It was the Russian-navy salute.

"We'd better do a lot of plannin'," Pale-Face says, "and get well organized. Part of the organizin' will be plenty of ammunition, some binoculars and two good thirty-thirty rifles. Oh, don't get alarmed, I'm not going to declare war—merely defend ourselves."

WHEN the ice went out the next summer the both of us was in good shape. We'd put in a lot of time eatin' and mushin' dogs. They was just gettin' the Nome dog-races started and everybody was excited. It struck me Pale-Face was gettin' our legs in shape for some tall runnin'.

The tradin' schooner, *Polar Sea,* was goin' across to East Cape to do a little tradin' with the Russians and natives and we got passage. With the days twenty-four hours long we couldn't hope to pull off anything under cover of darkness. There weren't any darkness.

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The schooner skipper wasn't any too pleased with his passengers, either. "If a Russian gunboat orders us to heave to," he warns, "I'll heave to. I can't get away from 'em, and I don't propose to ruin' my good standin' with Russian officials in this region. My business depends on it."

"Cross their palms with gold," Pale-Face suggests, "and I'll stand the cost." He figgers they might be *had,* but he didn't want to risk it hisself.

I was below asleep when we drops anchor at East Cape. It ain't much of a place. There's a treeless mountain that rises up out of icy water, and a sand spit. The ice had just gone out and the natives had killed a lot of walrus and drug 'em ashore. They had the walrus heads up on racks, dryin' and some of 'em were puttin' meat into the cache. We could see the doin's through binoculars. There was some stirrin' round on the beach and pretty soon a *umiak,* or skin-boat comes out. Natives were paddlin' it and there was a Russian officer settin' amidships smokin' a cigarette.

"This is where I go below," Pale-Face whispers to me. "If that isn't Ivan Koroff it's his twin brother." He snuck below and hid hisself in the cargo.

I went for'd and took the line the *umiak* sent aboard and fussed around like I was one of the crew. It was Koroff, sure enough. He had some white-fox pelts he wanted to trade and a few Russian sable. It looked like a stall to me to give him a chance to see who was aboard. The skipper got out tobacco and a few things and I asked permission to go ashore and look around while they was dickerin'. I figgered two could play at that game.

It was all right with the skipper and Koroff nods his head and says somethin' in dialect to the crew in the *umiak.* I goes down the ladder and sets on a thwart. It's coated with seal-oil and smells of it.

The native in the stern handles a steerin' oar and he's somethin' to write home about. He's got bangs almost to his eyes, which makes his head look round. The high cheekbones show he's got plenty of Mongol in his veins. He's got a football mustache—eleven hairs on a side, and some chin whiskers. There ain't more than fifteen or twenty hairs on his chin, but they're stiff as bristles. One of the crew has been slashed across the eye with a knife. The eyeball wasn't cut, but the scarred skin gives him a perpetual leer.

I'd never seen a tougher bunch. They heads for the beach a mile away and about a hundred natives line up in rows. The beach is steep, so each row can look over the heads of the row in front.

They're wearin' denim parkas, it bein' warm, and most of the wimmin' have a baby in their parka hood. Fierce-lookin' dogs sniff around or howl dismally and there's a moanin' breeze blowin' across the sand spit where the settlement is built.

WHAT the settlement ground needed was a good goin'-over with a rake, then a bonfire. It's littered with bones, pieces of fish the dogs haven't chawed up, and the lord only knows what else. It would have shocked a health inspector. As I jumped ashore a native with most of his teeth gone leaps at me and says, "Hello."

I says hello and shakes his hand, then comes a painful silence. He's exhausted all his English in that one blast, but he motions me to follow him, so I trails along. He's proud as the

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dickens to have grabbed hisself a stranger. Maybe it gives him social standin'. If so, it's the first time any of my bunch of the McGees boosted somebody up the social ladder.

He takes me to his igloo. It's made of sod and driftwood and the top's covered with walrus hides held in place with sealskin lines. Heavy stones attached to the ends keep the lines in place. He's got a copper-colored squaw inside. She's slim, with black hair, fine teeth and there's somethin' wild and primitive about her that makes a man think of the dark ages.

She was wearin' somethin' a white woman would've buttoned up in front, but she seemed unconscious of the neck line. I never saw anything lower even at the swell dances. The Eskimo smiles and waves his hand around the igloo. I didn't catch on at first, then I figgers he's offerin' me the hospitality of his home. And that includes everything that's his. I'd read about Eskimo hospitality in books, and here I was up to my ears in it.

I waves my hands, explainin' I wasn't stayin' long enough to really be called a house guest. I guess you might say I was window shoppin'. I tried to talk English, but he shook his head, then suddenly got an idear. He takes my arm and I smiles at the squaw. My mother had learned me never to be rude to a host, and I'd been told when in Rome do as the Romans do, but . . .

He takes me to another igloo and there's the oldest Eskimo I ever saw. He limps up and looks close into my eyes. "You from San Francisco?" he asks.

You could've knocked me over with a feather. "Sure," I says, figgerin' he didn't know his geography.

"I been San Francisco," he says. "Market Street, ferry buildin'. Barbary Coast. Dance like this." He grabs a simperin' young squaw and starts two-steppin' round the igloo. "You got cigar?"

"Sure," I answers. I fished one out of my pocket, stuck it into his mouth and held a match. He puffs awhile, gets the end glowin' nicely, then inspects the end like you see men do in swell clubs. No foolin' that cuss had been places.

"Father on whaler," he says. "Me, I go San Francisco on whaler."

"How about a little snort?" I says.

He gets that, so I fishes out a flask of whisky. He pulls the cork, measures the bottle with his fingers and says, "Here's lookin' at yuh."

"Down the hatch," I answers. And he takes three fingers as neat as you ever saw.

"Ah," he says, comin' up for air. "Elegant stuff." Yes sir, he'd sure been places.

I can see he's a quarter-breed, so I figgers it's his grandfather who was on a whaler. He says somethin' in dialect and the others, includin' the man who'd brought me there, clears out.

"You come for gold?" he asks. "You with feller who come last year?"

I don't know whether I smells a rat or not. Then I figgers this cuss is prouder of his English blood than he is of his native, and I remember what somebody said about blood bein' thicker'n water. "I thought I might prospect a little," I says.

"Watch out," he says, "gunboat catch you sure as catfish. Everybody plenty mad. Feller get away in *umiak* last year. Russian think maybe he come back for more. Or maybe he didn't take all."

"Thanks for the tip," I says. "And have another snort?"

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"Don't care if I do," he answers. "Here's to Madame Marie on the Barbary Coast, the whaler's friend." No doubt of it, he'd been places and I took the hint. I went back aboard the schooner, got me a couple of quarts we'd been savin' against bad colds, or rattlesnake bite. Hold on, don't interrupt, I know there ain't no snakes in Alaska and the Arctic. As I was sayin' I gave the old boy the two quarts and my blessin'.

The schooner traded about a week, with Pale-Face keepin' below decks, then we sails for points to the northwest. Pale-Face paced the deck and prayed for a fog, but the weather stayed bright and clear. Finally he says, "Drop us, Captain!"

THE skipper puts our *umiak* over the side and we lowers our outfit into it, then drops in ourselves. The skipper mops his brow and wishes us luck. He acts like we had smallpox. "I've been afraid a gunboat would show up, find you aboard, Mulcahy, and confiscate my schooner. Don't ever ask passage of me again. You won't get it." And he mops his brow once more.

We steps a small mast, raises a sail and goes skimmin' over the water. Fifteen hours later Pale-Face puts into a small bay and lands the outfit, then we sails down the coast three miles and heads up a small creek. It takes us two hours to cache the *umiak* and cover it with tundra. We wades downstream so as to not leave tracks, but it ain't so bad, as we're wearing *mukluks* with waterproof seams.

"Where's this gold?" I asks Pale-Face when we gets back to the outfit.

"Let's build a fire," he answers.

There's a pile of driftwood above highwater mark and some blackened stones, but he don't build the fire there. He builds it on the edge of the tundra, throws on a lot of damp wood and up goes a cloud of smoke and steam that just about blots out the sun. Then he starts diggin' amongst them blackened stones. Two feet below the surface he uncovers the gold cache. "It's here!" he exclaims, in a relieved voice. "I was afraid they might've found it. Let's get it covered up before the smoke dies down. No tellin', they might have spotters on the ridge."

"Don't you think we'd better get the *umiak*, load this aboard and get out?" I suggests.

"The breed in the village warned you, didn't he?" he answers. "He said the gunboat would catch us? Well, now isn't the time to move. I'd sooner the gunboat commander tipped his hand first."

He led the way to a little creek a half mile away, and the first thing I spots is a pile of tailin's, a rocker and a pond of water. He'd diverted the creek, cleaned out the pocket, and the water had seeped in formin' the pond.

We put in a couple of weeks drainin' the pond and prospectin'. From time to time Pale-Face takes a run up to the ridge, swings back and forth, lookin' for tracks possible spotters might've left. He don't find a thing.

"I'm beginning to think," he says, "the Russians don't know that we landed from the schooner. But I'm not going to lean on that theory just yet, old son."

We takes out a little money in the weeks that follow, but not enough to start a stampede. The sun plays along the horizon twenty-four hours a day for awhile, then it begins to dip. Each day the dip below the horizon is lower and we know summer's drawin' to a close.

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We're gettin' a little darkness for a change and it's somethin' we can use. The two of us dig up the gold cache and pack it to the *umiak.* We don't put it aboard, but cache it in a small pool and let the sand cover it up. He ain't takin' no chance on somebody findin' the *umiak* and sailin' away with six thousand ounces of gold.

"Why not make a run for it tomorrow night?" I suggests.

"No," he answers, "the time ain't right."

"Before we know it," I argues, "the pack ice will be comin' down again." Calculatin' is all right for him, but I still believe in luck.

"That's just what I'm waitin' for," he answers.

A week later we're back at camp and I'm workin' the rocker when a cloud of smoke comes over the horizon. "The Russian gunboat," he yells. "I've had a hunch it's been hangin' round here all the time. I've had a feelin' in my bones, too, that we've been watched even if I couldn't find tracks on the ridge."

"Listen," I says, "you hightail it out of here. They haven't got a thing on me. I'm an American citizen, with the proper permit, doin' a little prospectin' on Russian soil. May be they'll check me over and clear out. That's the worst they can do. With them gone, we can head for Nome."

SUDDENLY I sees his game. He's waitin' for the threat of the pack ice to chase the gunboat south. I say as much and he only grins. "That's just part of it," he admits, finally, "and the smallest part." Then he picks up his rifle and a pack of grub. "You're right, McGee, they've nothing on you, while I may be wanted. I'll clear out while you find out their game."

"All right," I agrees, "you'd better take more grub than that, just in case. Also, two sleepin' bags in camp will look queer. Take yours along, you might need it."

Our *mukluks* are the same size and pattern, so there's no way of tellin' whether one man or two made the tracks around camp. Twilight comes, then darkness. I can hear the trickle of water against the gunboat's bows, and the shout of the man in the chains who is takin' soundin's. After awhile the anchor goes down.

In the mornin' a boat's crew lands and who steps ashore but Ivan Koroff. He's wearin' a big coat with gold buttons, a clankin' sword, a revolver and is backed up by a squad of sailors. "Where is Mr. Mulcahy?" he asks politely.

"I'm prospectin' alone," I answers. And that was the truth. Pale-Face had told me any gold I took out was mine, as a reward for helpin' him out. I had a couple of thousand dollars worth in a moose-hide poke.

"I am no fool," he snaps in his precise English. "You were his partner in Nome."

"We aren't pardners any more," I answers. "You know how it is!"

"Exactly," he says, then he snaps out somethin' in Russian and a couple of the sailors nudge me with the muzzles of their rifles.

"What's the play?" I asks. "I am an American citizen. I'm here on Russian soil under a permit." I flashes my permit on him and he glances at it and sticks it in his pocket.

"And now you haven't any permit," he says. "You are under arrest." The men dump my outfit into the boat and push me into it, and me kickin' like a bay steer and tellin' 'em they can't do that to me. And all the while they're doin' it.

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The skipper can't speak English, so Koroff does all the translatin' with me bowin' my neck and gettin' madder every minute. "Have you ever thought of mining for salt?" Koroff asks finally. He speaks with soft confidence that left no doubt in my mind.

"I can't say that I have," I answers.

"Only the very strong survive," he says, "and you don't look . . . shall we say, robust?"

I looks around the gunboat, and my gaze lingers on the Russian flag and the guns. Golly Moses, the United States seemed a long ways away, but just the same I get good and mad. They ain't got no business cuttin' in on Pale-Face's gold any way, and I'm blamed if I'm goin' to show the white feather, Siberian salt mines or not.

"I might last a year in your cursed salt mines," I suggests, "but that'd hardly be worth the trouble of shippin' me there. There's no percentage in handlin' weaklings like me who'll peter out on you."

"Enough of this sparring!" he snaps. "You know where Mulcahy is. You know he has a gold cache."

"Do you know it?" I asks.

"We do!" he snaps.

"Then what's the use of askin' me questions?" I yells. "And what's more you can't do this to an American citizen."

He turns his back on me, talks to the skipper and that big bruiser barks orders in Russian and pretty soon a landin' party goes over the side.

It sounds kinda funny, a Navy vessel landin' armed sailors to flush out one lone American, but it's logical, as the feller says. The Navy's the only law up there. There's a Cossack at East Cape but he ain't got a horse, and he couldn't swim them icy streams if he did have.

THEY swing along the beach, spread out and commence to go through the tundra. I've got my binoculars, so I watch the show and I get kinda tense when they draw near to the spot where I figger Pale-Face is hidin'.

All at once I catches a puff of smoke and a sailor a quarter mile off jumps two feet off'n the ground, then goes down in a heap. He ain't hurt. You can tell that by the way he wiggles to cover. It's plain Pale-Face Mulcahy figgers the nonsense has gone far enough. He knows if they find his food cache and sleepin' bag all they've got to do is to take 'em. He'll either have to show up at East Cape or starve to death. It comes to me, too late, we should've left plenty of grub near the cached *umiak* along with the gold.

Koroff's sword flashes, the landin' party flattens out and opens fire. I can see them clippin' tundra all around where Mulcahy is hidin' and he just let's 'em clip awhile, then all at once he goes into action. The Russians stand it as long as they can, then fall back. Just as he said, sailors are bum shots.

The gunboat hoists a string of signal flags and the landin' party, fallin' back in good order to the beach, piles into the boat and returns.

I tries to wipe the grin off'n my face. "Mulcahy is a very poor shot," Koroff says.

"That makes it unanimous," I says. "Listen, you boys were playin' for keeps, but Mulcahy wasn't tryin'. He could've murdered you if he'd wanted to. I've seen him knock over too many caribou on the dead run not to know what he can do with a thirty-thirty. I wouldn't crowd him if I was you."

Koroff salutes the skipper, says a few words and the old man brushes his spade beard and rubs a pair of eye-

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brows with hair enough on 'em to make a pillow. Then he bellows his orders. A gun crew pulls the canvas coverin' off a for'd gun, and ammunition comes up from below.

They blaze away and kick up the dirt above Mulcahy's hideout. The next shot falls a little short. They're gettin' the range now and I holds my breath while the sight-setter is turnin' a couple of gadgets. My common sense tells me Mulcahy is a fool to try and lick a warship. But I feel sorry for the cuss just the same. His own early struggles, and a lot of sickly brothers and sisters has done things to him. His fear of poverty, sickness and early death is greater than his fear of guns. He's goin' down with flyin' colors, or he's goin' to win out.

They throw another load into the breech and the plug goes home with a smash. I'm lookin' at the gun crew, when I look up again, Mulcahy is high-tailin' it across country, with his outfit on his back. The trainer shifts the gun slightly, then she roars.

Muck and tundra fly into the air a hundred feet behind Mulcahy and he goes down. There's a cheer from the Russians, and I don't do myself any good by jeerin' 'em. Before the cheers end, Mulcahy is up and runnin' again. "Good old Pale-Face," I yells.

Well, they've got him into the open, so over the side goes the landin' party again. In the midst of all this, the tradin' schooner that's been far up the Siberian Coast, shows up. That old American flag flappin' in the breeze sure looks good to me, and I'm wonderin' what it must look like to Pale-Face Mulcahy when the landin' party hits the beach.

The for'd gun roars and chases Mulcahy up the hill, then drops a shell in behind him to run him down again. The strategy is clear—keep him in the open until the sailors can pick him off with their rifles.

The tradin' schooner comes in close and speaks the Russian. The skipper can talk the lingo. When he's through jabberin' with the commander he spots me. "Are you a prisoner?" he asks.

"They can't do this to me," I yells back. Just about then I remembers Elsie must be at Nome. "Never mind me," I says, "just tell the marshal at Nome about it. Now listen, don't say anything about this battle. There's a girl who's been waitin' ten years to marry Pale-Face. She's come all the way to Nome to get married. If she hears about this battle, she'll worry."

"Worry?" the skipper roars. "Worry! You poor fool, you don't think Pale-Face will ever get out of this jam do you?"

"Danged if I know," I answers, "but I ain't givin' up hope. He's sure playin' his cards smooth, and they's no sense in a nice girl believin' her sweetheart's dead until he is."

"They've got him right where they want him," the skipper yells back. "If he don't surrender he'll be dead in five minutes."

III

IT SURE looked bad. There was Pale-Face crouchin' in a low spot and the men movin' toward it. The low spot was about halfway up the side of the ridge, and kinda protected by shoulders of dirt. One good shell planted in one of them shoulders would fill the low spot.

The first shell went high but Mulcahy figgered they'd call the turn on the next. While the landin' party was rushin' up the slope, he suddenly breaks in the clear, runs a hundred yards and dives behind a heap of stones before

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any of 'em can get into action. They're watchin' the shellin' and he catches 'em completely by surprise.

At the same time he goes into action. Luck was with him on his first shot. He shoots the sword out of Koroff's hand. And I know even he ain't that good. His next shot glances off a rock, but bits of rock pepper a sailor's face and he drops down.

The others are shootin' from all angles and I take a look at the gun crew. It's standin' by waitin' for orders. Even I can see if one of their shots falls short it'll like as not kill some of their own men.

Every now and again Pale-Face pops up and eases a shot at a sailor. They begin to give ground. The bullets are comin' too close for comfort and their own fire ain't nothin' to brag about. You can't do your best when you're expectin' the other feller will get you any minute.

Suddenly up goes a flag above my head and a bugler on the beach blares. The landin' party falls back with plenty of caution and comes aboard. "How much ammunition do you suppose he has?" Koroff asks me.

I figger Mulcahy's ammunition must be getting low, but I answers, lightly, "Oh, about five hundred rounds. But you boys needn't worry, he won't hurt you unless you crowd him too much. Then he'll get down to business. If he kills one, then he'll go all the way and make a good job of it. Because, you see, he knows you can't shoot or hang him more'n once."

I think Koroff realizes Pale-Face has been just scarin' his men, and that he could have killed 'em all if he'd wanted to.

"You see," I explains, "he don't want a killin' charge again' him. But he'll go all the way, if you crowd him."

The commander and Koroff go below for a powwow, and the next thing I know the sailors are gettin' up the anchor. "Hey," I yells, "why can't I be put aboard that schooner? I ain't done nothin' again' the Czar."

"We need men like you," Koroff says, "in the salt mines."

The saddest thing I ever saw was that schooner sailin' toward Nome with the stars and stripes flutterin' the breeze. I felt funny in the stomach, but I was glad in a way. The Russians were quittin' because they couldn't bag Mulcahy with a cannon, nor get their men close enough to bring him down with a rifle.

Somebody hands me a snort of vodka and when that took a hold I figgered why Russians have beards—I could feel tufts of hair begin to sprout on my ears. Things commence to blur, then the deck flew up and hit me.

I'm in a hammock when I try to wake up, and I've got a head as big as a squaw's chest. Blinkin' my eyes and peerin' through a porthole I spots something that looks like a blur of East Cape in the distance. When I wakes up the second time, we're anchored and Koroff's gone ashore.

The gunboat's got a brig, or jail, but nobody throws me into it. Like as not they figger I won't blow up the ship, and they know I wouldn't last five minutes in the icy water. I wanders about deck and nobody pays me the slightest attention.

THREE or four hours later an *umiak* comes from the village and ties up at the gangway. A half dozen Eskimos come on deck and start tradin' carved ivory to the sailors. Among 'em is my old San Francisco friend. He don't recognize me, and I don't let on

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I've ever seen him before. After awhile he shows me a cribbage board made of a walrus tusk.

"Don't try to get away," he whispers, "they're lookin' for an excuse to kill you."

"Is that why I ain't locked up?" I asks.

He nods and I see the play—if I'm shot tryin' to escape Uncle Sam can't make an incident out of it. They'll say I should've worked through the American consul, and Uncle would've agreed.

"They'll leave a small boat astern," he whispers again, "but don't take it." He grinned. "You give me fine whisky. I come out to tell you."

Sometimes I think there are moments when a snort, or a bottle of whisky are the soundest investment a man can make, if he's lookin' for quick dividends.

"Listen," I whispers, "have they quit tryin' to catch the other fellow, Mulcahy?"

"Pretty soon," he answers, "you see smoke on mountain. Smoke means Mulcahy tryin' to sail to Nome. Then they catch him."

"Thanks," I answers, "if I get out of this mess alive and ever have the chance, I'll buy you a case of whisky." I gives him my five-dollar watch for the cribbage board to make it look like there was a business deal on, and then does some tall thinkin'. It's plain Pale-Face is goin' to be caught and there ain't nothin' I can do to help him, unless I can get away, sail up the coast and warn him.

That night, all is peaceful aboard, and the first thing I see as twilight begins, is a small boat with a sail bobbin' up and down astern. It'd be a cinch to slide down the rope, cast off and make a run for it. And I'd've done it, too, but for that breed Eskimo's warnin'. At that I'm tempted until that old hymn comes into my mind. It goes, "Yield not to temptation, for yieldin' is sin."

When I turns in that night, I can see Koroff's disappointed. He ain't gettin' to first base with his plans. Several days pass, the pack ice is gettin' closer and the natives are beginnin' to get ready for a walrus hunt, but the gunboat stays at anchor.

Suddenly I catches a column of smoke on the mountain top. It's just daybreak, but it's plain enough. Koroff trains a telescope on it, nods his head and sends word to the skipper. Ten minutes later the're gettin' up the anchor.

That skipper's no fool. He knows all about the wind and currents and what time an *umiak* will make under sail with a desperate American at the steerin' oar. He lays out a course that'll put Pale-Face Mulcahy under his guns inside of twenty-four hours.

Shortly before darkness sets in that night the gunboat slows down. They take soundin's, then drop anchor. The skipper ain't takin' chances of pilin' into an ice floe in the dark. They turn off all lights above decks and hang canvas over the portholes where they had to use lights below decks.

That gives me an idear. When nobody's lookin' I fix canvas on portholes on the port and starboard side so a crack of light will show. I figger if Mulcahy spots it, he'll know it's the Russian and he will give her a good wide berth.

Everybody turns in, except the officer of the deck, and the usual deck watch. It's a dirty night and the officer of the deck hunts a warm spot. As soon as he's out of sight, the men ease theirselves into sheltered places.

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THERE'S no small boat driftin' astern this night, but just the same I sneaks up on deck when the coast is clear. There's a long chance Pale-Face will mistake the crack of light for a tradin' schooner, and I want to be around to warn him off.

About two in the mornin' I hears a faint rattle, then a squeak, like a steerin' oar shiftin' in it's lock. Then comes the trickle of water again' an *umiak's* bow. It's blacker'n hell, but I spots Mulcahy's *umiak* movin' slowly along under shortened sail. It's all I can do to keep from yellin' with joy. There ain't much wind blowin', but with luck he should be out of sight before daylight.

He waves his hand, and I figgers he's spotted me again' the starlight. I waves back again, and thinks, well, there he goes to his Elsie. And I'm glad. Their faith, patience and courage rates them the best there is in happiness. While I'm standin' there, thinkin' and makin' sure nobody's spotted him, he comes back again. He lowers the sail and lets the *umiak* drift under the stern.

There's a coil of rope on deck and I takes a quick turn around a cleat, drops the end over the stern and slides down. "You crazy fool," I hisses, "to come back for me."

He pushes a paddle into my hand and, dippin' silently, we backs away. A quarter mile from the gunboat he hoists sail. "You shouldn't've done it," I says.

"What'd you hang 'round on deck for?" he asks.

"To warn you in case you blundered into us," I explains. "They'd covered up all lights, hopin' you'd do just that. I fixed it so a couple would show."

"I saw one," he answers, "and that's why I came up with shortened sail—so I could size things up. If it was a trader, my troubles were over. Then I saw it was the gunboat and I figgered you were aboard. Naturally I wasn't going to leave you."

"If I'd've figgered you'd do that," I snaps, "I'd've left the gunboat in darkness. You should think of Elsie."

"I was," he answers. "When we marry and settle down to real happiness, I don't want any regrets hauntin' me. And if I'd have passed you up, old son, I never would have felt right."

The wind petered out a half hour later, and we grabs the paddles. Day was just breakin' when we spots a floe ahead. It's seven miles long, as a guess, and a half mile wide—the advance guard of the pack ice headin' south into the Berin' Sea.

Mulcahy heads for it and lets out a squawk. "You fool, do you want to get us caught in the ice? An Eskimo can live all winter on seal and walrus meat, but I can't."

"Listen, old son," he answers goodnaturedly enough, "I figgered out every move long ago. And this is one of 'em."

The bow comes up against the ice and I jumps onto the floe. In a few minutes we've unloaded everything onto the ice. The two of us haul the *umiak* out, put it on a small sled and haul it across the floe and launch it in a lead on the other side. We're just reloadin' the gold when the gunboat shows up. She's a long ways off but somebody in the crow's nest spots us, and a minute later smoke's pourin' from her stack.

We get under sail, but there ain't wind enough to flutter a flag. That Russian gunboat gets larger and larger and pretty soon there's a golden flash and the air's full of ice as the shell hits the floe. I wonder if he's calculated what a shell could do to a *umiak?*

"They can't reach us," Pale-Face yells, answerin' my thoughts.

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IV

I DON'T say nothin'! I'm tryin' to make my paddle move the *umiak* sixty miles an hour, but we're crawlin' along about four. A half hour later a shell kicks up a column of water a half mile astern.

The firin' dies down and the next sixty minutes are the kind of suspense that takes the heart out of a man. "They must be almost up against the floe by now," Mulcahy says.

A column of water a hundred yards astern is the answer. They've got as close as they can get, and have settled down to business. The next shell screams over head and strikes a hundred yard ahead. "They've got the range, blast 'em!" I yells.

"So it would seem," he answers.

He changes the course slightly and I have the doubtful satisfaction of seein' the next shell hit where we'd been. Two more came, then things quieted down.

"They'll have to go around the ice," Mulcahy says. "We'll have four or five hours of peace and quiet. You'd better get some rest."

"Rest?" I croaks. "With that gunboat after us? Not me! Don't you realize we're trapped? All they'll have to do is to keep ahead of the pack ice and we'll be forced into their arms."

"Then," he answers, ignorin' my argument, "I'll get some sleep." And by golly he flops down and sleeps like a baby. I don't wake him up until the gunboat is ten miles astern. It's gone around the ice now.

There's quite a breeze and I'm wonderin' whether we'd better not take in some sail. "Let 'er blow," Pale-Face orders, "and shift the ballast."

It's a race, then, with the *umiak* skimmin' along. They're light and ride high. Two strong men could lift ours, and yet it'd hold nearly two tons. Once in awhile the water would splash over the bow, it was that rough. But it wasn't rough enough to stop the gunboat from shootin' at us.

The shells hit the water and bounce two or three times, sending geysers into the air behind us. But gradually they get closer.

Pale-Face wakes up after awhile and I points ahead. "Ain't that smoke?"

"It should be," he answers. I'm too busy steerin' to handle a pair of binoculars, so he stands up, braces hisself and takes a long look. "A United States revenue-cutter," he says.

I busts out singin' *Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue* and looks over my shoulder. That Russian gunboat can see the revenue cutter. Its bridge is much higher than our *umiak*, so they know it's there, but it don't stop 'em. It keeps right along easin' shells at us. Pale-Face Mulcahy takes over the steerin' and suggests I'd better get some sleep before my nerves go to pieces. "Tryin' to be funny?" I sneers.

He changes the course so we're in line with the revenue cutter and a half hour later the Russians have to quit shootin'. They're afraid one of them bouncin' shells will hit the cutter. It's changed its course and is headin' for us. The rail is black with men, mostly young cusses who've let their beards grow. But you can't make a Russian out of an American no matter how much whiskers he can grow. And them kids looked as good as the flag flutterin' at the masthead.

Pale-Face puts the *umiak* alongside and down comes a gangway. "We're Americans in distress," he says. "My name is Mulcahy and this cuss's name is McGee."

"And mine is Finnegan," says the man on the bridge. He's a four-striper

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and that means he's the skipper. "And so it's in distress you are?"

"Something like that," Mulcahy admits. "I—"

"Mulcahy fought 'em off single-handed to save his gold," I says. "And he didn't quit even when they unlimbered their for'd deck gun. Not only that, he snuk up in the dark and took me off the gunboat—"

"Heck," says Finnegan, "you men can take care of yourselves. You don't need a revenue cutter." But just the same he passes the word, a boom comes down and lifts our *umiak* aboard. By that time the Russian has broke out a bunch of signal flags which mean they want to talk it over.

THE gunboat heaves to, drops a boat, and pretty soon Koroff comes over the side. He's wearin' a cocked hat and is greeted by side boys and a bos'n's mate blows on his pipe. There's salutes and then Koroff goes below.

I can hear loud words, and finally Finnegan says, "We admit he resisted you. We admit everything, but it goes back to some of your civilian officials. They wanted Mulcahy's gold, which he took legally, and tried to frame him. Well, they aren't going to get away with it. You will note he was careful not to kill or even wound any of your men. And he could have murdered the entire landing party. The two gentlemen are American citizens in distress and it is the duty of the revenue-cutter service to aid them."

There was a long silence and after awhile Koroff comes out. He looks a hole through me and Pale-Face, returns all salutes, and goes back to his ship.

"Now, McGee," Mulcahy says, "maybe you'd like a little sleep."

When I woke up, the revenue cutter was wallowin' in a storm off'n Nome. It was two days before she could land us through the surf. And when we did go ashore, it was in the *umiak*. Folk on the beach saw us comin' and when we hit the sand, dozens of hands grabbed the skin boat and carried us high and dry.

There was a girl standin' apart from the crowd—a pretty girl, with her soul in her eyes and her lips parted in a welcomin' smile. I knowed it was Elsie. It couldn't've been anyone else. Mulcahy doesn't say a word, but I can see he keeps swallowin' suthin' in his throat. He opens his arms, and closes them again and he looks down and kisses her, then looks across the tundra and I know he's seein' farther than Anvil Rock, farther even than Alaska or the whole American continent. He's lookin' ten years back and countin' the cost. And bein' what he is, he's findin' it worth it.

After awhile he says, "We can be married today, and leave on tomorrow's boat." She smiles and nods and then he comes over and says, "Elsie, this is McGee. You'll be hearin' about him the rest of your life."

"Why scare the girl out of a weddin'?" I asks. "Listen, Elsie, you're marryin' a gent who has not only brains, but plenty of luck. If he fell into a swamp, he'd prob'ly come up with a poke of gold in his hand. Just when he needed a revenue cutter worst, one comes over the horizon. And if that ain't luck, I don't know what is."

"McGee," he says, "it wasn't luck at all. It was methodical calculation. My bookkeeping training coming to the surface. I knew the revenue cutter would come out ahead of the ice, and that's why I didn't start until the ice moved south."

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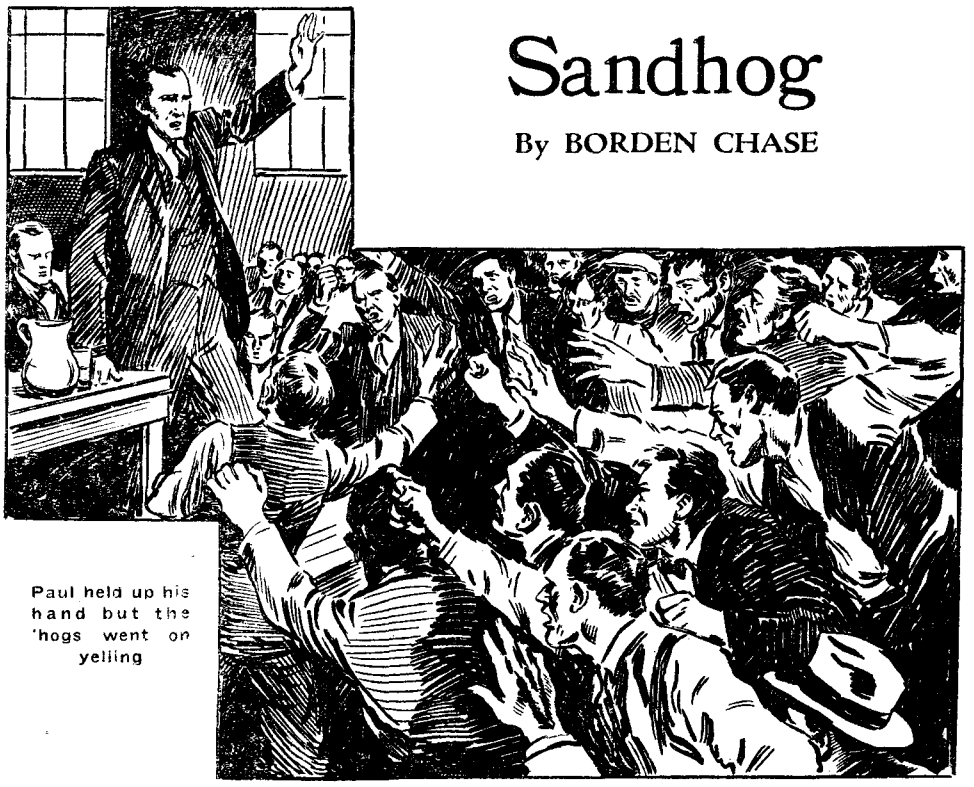
Sandhog

By BORDEN CHASE



Paul held up his hand but the 'hogs went on yelling

UNDER the river, down in the muck, with the threat of death hanging continuously over their heads, ready to spring at the next thrust of the shovel, always waiting . . . to crush, to maim, to kill. . . . So work the sandhogs, a tough breed of men, fierce and proud.

Such a one was Bert Saxon, risen from the ranks of the mucker to tunnel-superintendent for that graceless dilettante among engineers, Paul Touchet, who preferred a Mozart sonata to any reality of life or work that you could name.

Kay McLane was of the sandhog clan, too—but she'd broken away, sickened with the misery and tragedy of the sandhogs' women's lives. That is, she thought she had, until she re-met Bert Saxon, and their boy-and-girl-sweetheart love sprang up again between them. She'd met Paul Touchet, too—and the two men symbolized the clash of her desires. Bert, the life she'd left but which fascinated her still with its strength, its constant threat of peril. Paul, the life she was trying to grow into, cultured, urbane, charmingly superficial.

Paul plans to submit bids for the new East-River tunnel, but because his financial circumstances are in one of their chronically difficult periods, he is forced to take into partnership one Gus Blaucher—a crude, wily, unscrupulous grafter and climber. Bert Saxon refuses to have anything to do with any job that Gus Blaucher has any part of.

BERT'S opinion of Gus Blaucher and of the conditions under which Blaucher's men work is borne out when there is a slide on Blaucher's Fulton-Street excavation job.

It is Blaucher's practice to employ strictly union labor—but for the delicate subterranean operations, he is quite as apt to use unskilled above-ground hands. It is one of these hands, unused to sandhogging, who has, by his inexperience and carelessness, precipitated the Fulton-Street cave-in.

And only Bert Saxon's yeoman rescue-work gets three of the four entombed men out alive. Kay McLane, who has impulsively accompanied him, watches, fascinated, feeling again the old thrill, the old despair, of the sandhog's woman.

Later she and Bert walk through Brooklyn's late-night streets. Bert, half jokingly, proposes to her. Kay is confused. She does not know how to answer.

This story began in the Argosy for November 13

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One of Bert's sandhog-friends passes them on the street. He makes some joke about Bert's evening clothes. "Better take care of that suit, Saxon. They cost five bucks a night to rent."

PERHAPS it's Bert's mood. Perhaps an accumulation of moods and half unconscious thoughts. At any rate, that jesting phrase touches off a spark in Bert. In a flash, he suddenly realizes the helplessness of the sandhogs at the mercy of shrewd crooks like Blaucher. He, Bert Saxon, is on Easy Street—while they, who work and sweat and die, under him . . .

He determines then and there to help the sandhogs organize—to help them fight. It is a decision which is to change the whole course of his life—one which, having made, he is never to go back upon.

CHAPTER IX

UNION HALL

A WIDE green lawn sloped gently toward the waters of Long Island Sound. It was tree-bordered, rimmed with red-brick walks that wound through rose gardens and beds of varicolored flowers. August sun colored the waters of the Sound and warmed the breeze that was welcome after the heat of the day. A squirrel raced from a tree to investigate with beady eyes the couple seated beneath a striped awning on the terrace.

Paul Touchet stirred the ice in his tall glass, twisting it slowly around and around as he watched Kay offering a broken cracker to the inquisitive squirrel. She was wearing a summer dress of white linen. Her hat was a crownless straw and her jet hair showed as a small black cap above the wide brim. As always, she was neat, flawless. Even after a day of New York's summer heat there was a crisp freshness about her. Paul thought he had never seen a woman with the chameleon-like qualities of Kay McLane. At the theater or under the lights of a fashionable club she appeared as a creature made for the night. Yet under the harsh light of a summer sun these same qualities gave way to another set, equally attractive but entirely different.

Paul thought of the crispness of fresh mint and the tinkle of ice against cool beaded glass when he looked toward her. But when he looked off across the Sound to where his boat was moored, he remembered her as she had been earlier in the day when they raced the wind across the water in a smother of flying spray. That had been a different Kay. And Paul wondered if ever he would meet them all.

Now she was silent. Her hand was extended toward the squirrel and Paul looked gratefully at the soft curve of her arm. He liked beautiful things. Liked to see them. Study them. And for weeks he had been studying Kay McLane. Today was one of many spent at his summer place on Long Island. They had motored out, gone for a two-hour sail on the Sound and returned to sit on the wide terrace until Kay had decided what she would like to do that evening. As yet she had given him no hint, and Paul wondered.

"Why so quiet?" he asked.

The squirrel scampered off at the sound and Kay tossed the cracker to the lawn. "You've scared him. One more minute and he'd have eaten from my hand."

"Don't we all?"

"Not quite."

"To the best of my knowledge I've never seen a male creature refuse. Most of us fight for the privilege."

"Thank you, darling," she said lightly.

"I wish you'd forget to smile when you say that."

"When I say what?"

"Darling." He lifted his glass. "I've been trying for two months to give meaning to that word."

"But I do mean it," she smiled. "You *are* a darling, Paul."

"I'd make a marvelous husband."

"Are we going through that again?"

"I suppose not," he said. "I make it a rule not to propose more than three times in the same day. You've had your share, I think. . . . Once and for all—why won't you marry me, Kay?"

"Because I'm very happy as Kay McLane."

"Any other reasons?"

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"A few."

"Is Bert one of them?"

She twisted her glass, making wet circles on the blue enameled table. "I haven't seen Bert but that once at your apartment."

"He hasn't phoned you since?"

"No."

"Well, that adds up with the rest," said Paul. "The man is out of his mind."

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, I've told you before, Kay. This nonsense at the union—refusing to work for me, giving up his suite at the hotel and moving to Brooklyn. It's ridiculous—all of it."

"But what does he say? Has he given you any reasons?"

"Not any better ones than he gave you that night. He's simply become a fanatic. And proof of his madness is the fact he hasn't called you. If I knew Kay McLane were in love with me, I'd camp on her doorstep twenty-four hours a day."

"Perhaps I'm not in love with him."

"I wish that were true," said Paul slowly. "But I'm afraid I recognize the symptoms."

Kay looked off across the waters of the Sound. For a time Paul watched her in silence.

HE wasn't a fool. He'd met a great many interesting women, attractive women. He'd known love in most of its stages and had enjoyed playing at it. Because he was entirely satisfied with his present mode of life he had not encouraged any of the affairs—refused to allow them to become serious. And yet with Kay—

They had known each other less than a month and Paul realized he was more in love than ever before. And with this knowledge came realization he needed her. He wanted Kay to be his wife.

Bert Saxon was his danger. Paul realized that when Kay told him of the evening they had met after years apart. He had listened quietly and decided Bert would have to step lively to win this match. For a time he expected Bert to follow the usual routine. Dinners, theaters, week-ends at the seashore—there would be a scramble for Kay's time and a fight for her attention.

He liked Bert. They were friends. He wanted Bert to continue as his friend. But he knew enough of the world to realize this might not be. Should Kay decide to become Mrs. Paul Touchet—well, that was in the future.

But things had not gone as he planned. His own attack had been launched and he had waited for Bert's. But the tunnel-man had not even called Kay on the phone. There had been no appointments, no dinners. Not so much as a word in over two months. At first Paul was pleased. Then worried. When Bert came to his office he had talked only of the men or the job now in work. When Paul mentioned Kay there had been no answer. And then Paul noticed a change in his friend.

When he again suggested Bert work as superintendent, should he and Blaucher bid in the new East River job, Bert had bluntly told him to go to hell. Since then they had seen little of each other. And now Bert and the sandhogs were driving to completion the subway tunnel in lower Brooklyn. It would be finished this week. Not at a profit. But that was Paul's fault. His carelessness in sub-letting contracts had cost him a fortune. Some of this loss the men had helped to regain by rushing the work. He hadn't asked for it. Hadn't so much as hinted. But as the reports came in it was obvious Bert and the men were trying to save something out of the smash.

Paul was grateful. He tried to tell Bert one evening but had received no answer. Then, almost as though he did not want to take advantage of a napping opponent, Paul had told Bert he loved Kay and intended to marry her if possible. Bert had listened quietly. Once Paul noticed a flare of the old light that came to Bert's eyes when fight was mentioned. The tunnel-man started a laugh, lifted a hand as though in protest, but said nothing. After that Paul had never mentioned Kay again.

As summer ebbed he realized he was fighting a losing battle. Kay was kindly, interested, generous with her time and

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happy in his company. But always the shadow of Bert followed them. And today, as she looked off across the blue water Paul played his last card.

"Would you like to see him tonight?" he asked.

"Bert?"

"Yes."

"Not particularly."

"Let's be truthful," said Paul. "You know what I'm trying to do, Kay. I love you and you've known that for weeks. But I'm fighting shadows—competing with a phantom. For some fantastic reason you've glorified Bert Saxon—set him up as a god. Perhaps because of that foolish childhood romance. Perhaps for some other cause. Whatever it is, you're holding it as a shield before you. When I talk, you compare my words with the echo of Bert's. My promises—my plans—everything I suggest is measured against the half-forgotten dreams you shared with him. When you look at me you see him standing at my side—"

"Paul, please don't—"

"Let me finish, Kay," he insisted. "I don't mind comparisons if they're fair. I'm only too happy to meet the competition of any man made of flesh and blood. But good Lord—I can't fight a wraith!"

"And you suggest—"

"That you see Bert. See him as he is—a man. A good one, I'll admit. Big, fine, honest—but nevertheless a man."

She thought a moment. "That's fair enough, Paul—let's do it. Perhaps you're closer to the truth than you suspect, or—than I suspect, rather."

Paul reached across the table and patted her hand. "Good feller," he said. "We'll drive to the city, have a bite to eat on the way and picked him up at the hall."

"Are you sure he'll be there?"

"Positive. There's a meeting tonight. I got my notice yesterday."

She laughed. "*Your* notice? Are you a sandhog?"

"Didn't you know?" he asked. "I've carried a union card for years. Whenever I drive a tunnel I go on the inactive list—no voice at the meetings and no vote. Other times I've as much to say as your kid brother or Bert or any of the hogs."

"You're an odd man," she smiled. "And a pretty swell sort of one, too. Almost—I hope your experiment is a success."

THEY drove to a small roadhouse in Manhasset. Paul chose the wine with care and his conversation drifted from one casual topic to another. Not once during the meal nor on the drive to town did Paul mention Bert. Sometimes, as they spun along the smooth roads of Grand Central Parkway, he sang, or whistled quietly. Other times he turned to Kay and smiled—but said nothing. There was a long quarter-hour on the Queensboro Bridge. Then they cut across to Eighth Avenue and rolled south. Paul left the car at a nearby parking station and they walked to the union hall. A small group of sandhogs was gathered about the door of the five-story building on Forty-second Street. They smoked and talked quietly, nodding a greeting to others who went into the narrow doorway. Kay recognized some of them—there was old Barney O'Hara who had worked with her father years ago, Johnny Novasky the heading-boss who smoked a pipe rank enough to kill a lesser man, Marshy Maybe, the small twisted Engishman who had been blown through the face of a tunnel yet lived to tell of it. And standing near the curb she saw Terry Reardon, smiling and spitting as he twisted a cud of tobacco in his cheek.

All of the men nodded or waved to Paul. Some called him by name, laughed and asked if his dues were paid. Kay received her share of stares. When recognition came to a man he quickly smiled and touched his hat. There were whispered exchanges and soon Terry came toward her with his hands outstretched.

"Hello, little one," he said. "'Tis bad company you keep. But I'll forgive you this once for the dresses you sent young Helen. They were beautiful, Kay girl. She's the pride of the block."

"They weren't much," said Kay. "I hope they fit her."

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"And what was that remark about bad company?" added Paul. "Could you be meaning me, Terry?"

"That I do," said the miner. He nudged Kay gently. "Look out for a man what wears whiskers on his upper lip. He's not to be trusted."

"But I do trust him," laughed Kay. "He promised to get me a seat in the hall tonight."

Terry's face was grave. "Are you serious?"

"Why not?" said Paul. "We've come to get Bert but if the meeting isn't over we'd like to go in."

"Over?" said Terry. " 'Tis just started. It may last hours."

"So much the better," said Paul. "Be a sport, Terry—speak to the sergeant-at-arms and he'll let Kay go in."

"That's not so easy," said Terry doubtfully. "Wait here a bit and I'll see."

He went into the hall and others of the men followed. Soon Kay and Paul were left alone in front of the building. The night was young and the backwash of Times Square had not yet drifted across Eighth Avenue. Summer had quieted the midtown section of the city. A small group stood under the marquee of a picture house at the corner, reading the titles below the stills. A newsboy called of war and strikes and the latest murder. Across the street and farther west some people walked up the low steps of the church where Father Duffy had listened to the troubles of New York's children. Actors, fighters, thieves, thin-lipped touts and hard-faced women had climbed those steps with troubled eyes to return carrying a word of hope.

Kay watched the traffic streaming past and thought how right it was the hall should be here. Men who drove tunnel in the far corners of the world must gather somewhere. England, France, Belgium, South America and over the edge of the earth in China and Australia—all these places and many more knew the sandhogs. A thousand men, Americans working at a native trade, and their meeting place was just off Times Square.

Practical reasons set this place, Kay realized. More tunnels were driven here, larger tunnels. It was a central point where work was more plentiful than in any other city. But she liked to think New York was the real home of her clan. It was her home. One she loved. And the rush and hurry and life of its streets was symbolic of the work of the tunnel. Danger was here. It walked the streets and hid in the shadows. It was part of the city as it was part of the dark tubes beneath the city's rivers. But tonight Kay thought little of that. For the first time in weeks she was conscious of a feeling of satisfaction. She was going to see Bert. Talk with him. Hear him laugh and feel his hand upon her arm.

Paul seemed to sense the trend of her thoughts. He stood quietly, smoking one cigarette after another until Terry hurried across the sidewalk and paused beside them. He looked at the sandhog.

"Any luck?" he asked.

" 'Twill be all right for both if you keep very quiet. Tonight is a big one—you'll see soon. Your old friends are going to have a lot to say."

HE motioned to them and started up the stairs leading to the union hall. Paul took Kay's arm and wondered if she would realize he had come early with a purpose. He wanted her to see this meeting. Word had come to him Bert would speak. Rumors—odd whisperings by the men that something was in the air—had reached his office. No one was sure what it was. Nothing was definite. Paul had long since decided to be present but in his anxiety to be with Kay he had forgotten. Now chance had played along with him. And the fact Kay was a McLane had made it possible for her to get into the hall.

At the entrance to the long room where the meeting was held they were stopped by Jack Creadon, the sergeant-at-arms. He was a heavy-set man with long arms and wide hands. He asked for Paul's union book, inspected it carefully and handed it back. He smiled at Kay, patted her shoulder and pushed back the door. A wave

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of warm air surged out. Tobacco smoke and the peculiar odor of grouped men in a low-ceilinged room. Paul leaned toward Kay and put his lips to her ear.

"Sure you want to go in?"

"Very sure."

"There are two seats in the last row," he said, pointing. "Over near the window on the right."

"Go ahead. I'll follow you."

The union secretary was speaking from a raised platform at the far end of the hall and the eyes of the men were turned toward him. A small group standing in the rear squeezed back against the wall to let them pass. Paul nodded and whispered a quiet hello to some, shook hands with a miner he had not seen in months and finally came to the empty chairs. He motioned to Kay and she seated herself beside him. Her eyes searched the group on the platform and Paul saw her smile when she located Bert.

The contractor lit a cigarette and glanced along the rows of silent men. Their faces were grave and Paul sensed tension in the air. The sandhogs were waiting. They listened to the secretary's report, went through the routine motions of accepting it and edged forward on their chairs. Paul saw Jack Fynn, the business agent of the sandhogs, step forward. He was dressed, as were the others in the hall, in his best clothes. His hair had been combed and his face was bright from soap and water. He cleared his throat and faced the men.

"There's been some complaint," he said, "about that Jersey job Blaucher is doing."

A dull rumble of assent lifted and there were voices that said, "You're right, Jack." Paul drew hard on his cigarette and hooked an arm about the back of his chair.

"He's pulling the same old tricks," Flynn continued, "and right now I don't think there's much we can do. I've spoken to him —told him he wasn't living up to the contract. But he claims he is."

"He's a liar!" cried a mucker.

"I'm on that job," said another. "There's a man from a labor local workin' alongside me."

" 'Tis time we taught him a lesson," cried a tall, bull-necked man who stood when he shouted.

Paul recognized the speaker as Martin Duffy, a heading-boss second to none in the trade. The man was old in the tunnels and had worked on each of Paul's jobs. Quick with his tongue and quick with his fists, Duffy seldom missed an opportunity to fight. Right or wrong he spoke his mind, and seldom lowered his voice to do it. He stood now and glared at Flynn. The business agent lifted a hand to silence him.

"Time enough for that, Martin," he said. "We want no trouble with the big job starting."

"Big job be damned!" cried Duffy. "If there isn't one excuse there's another. I say 'tis time we taught Gus Blaucher a lesson. Pull the job and tie him up!"

Argument followed. There was quick discussion along the rows of seated men. Some stood and shouted opinions. Big Jerry Harkness, the union president, pounded his gavel and yelled for order. The voices dropped and silence shut down. Austin O'Rourke, the secretary stepped forward on the platform.

"I've been to see Blaucher," he said. "We're to meet again next week and talk things over. We don't want trouble now, men. Jack is right—the big job is important."

"Every job is important!" cried Duffy. "Big or small, Blaucher must know he's dealing with the hall."

"Will you be quiet, Duffy?" cried O'Rourke.

"I'll not be quiet! I'm right and you know it."

"You're *not* right!"

AGAIN voices were lifted in argument. Paul leaned closer to Kay and smiled. He saw her sitting stiffly, eyes straight ahead and lips closed tightly. She was looking past the men at the front of the platform and Paul knew she was watching the tall superintendent who leaned against the table and whispered with Harkness, the president.

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"Like it?" he asked quietly.

"I thought it might be like this."

"You've only heard the beginning," he smiled. "Wait until Duffy really starts to read the riot act."

"Is he right?"

"That's open to argument," said Paul. "And before long you'll hear plenty from both sides."

"Is that the reason for the meeting?"

"It *was* the reason. But something bigger has come up. The men are waiting. Do you notice they're hardly interested in what Duffy says?"

"What is it?" she asked. "What's going to happen?"

"Wait," said Paul. "We'll know in a moment. Bert is coming toward the front of the platform."

Even as he spoke a hush fell upon the meeting. The president's gavel sounded against the first complete silence of the evening. Duffy had opened his mouth to speak. He glanced at Bert, closed his mouth and sat down. The men leaned forward. Some rested their arms on the seats ahead of them and cupped hands to their ears. Paul stepped on his cigarette and smiled as his friend looked out over the crowd of waiting men.

CHAPTER X

SWAN SONG

BERT'S face was grave as he faced the sandhogs. His arms were folded and he stood quietly looking out over the hall. A man coughed. Nervously. A chair scraped against the floor and a heavy foot scuffed. Bert lifted a hand.

"You all know," he said quietly, "that I'm no longer working as general superintendent for the Touchet Construction Company. Until that job was finished I had no voice in this hall. Now it's done—and the secretary has restored me to active membership. I've asked our president for a few moments of your time. In them I may say some things you won't like to hear. Do you want me to say them?"

He smiled. And an answering grin came to the faces of the men. Paul looked about and recognized a tenseness in the group suggestive of something very familiar. He tried to recall where he had seen men gathered to stare upward with that fixed look of quiet expectancy. Then he knew. It was as though he were seated in some giant arena where a fight was to be held. An important fight. One that might crown a new champion. One that would be fought to a finish. And when Bert had joked it was as though the champion had clowned for a moment while waiting for his gloves to be laced. The men were friendly, but waiting. They wanted to hear what was coming next. Bert's grin drifted from his face and he stood square-footed before them.

"From the time I was old enough to handle a shovel," he said, "I've earned my living in a tunnel. And it's been a good living. Much better than any man of you facing me tonight. When I started at ten dollars a day, Johnny Novasky was a heading-boss drawing down a hundred—when he worked. Tonight, I see him there in the third row. He's still drawing down a hundred—when he works. But I'm getting five hundred and have been offered six. Within a year or two I can demand a thousand—and get it."

The crowd murmured and Paul looked questioningly toward Kay. Her eyes were wide in surprise—a surprise that mirrored Paul's feelings. Throughout the years he had known Bert Saxon he had never known the sandhog to brag. But tonight Bert was standing before his clan and boasting. Swaggering, would be the better word. He was looking down on the sandhogs and telling them he was a success. Paul leaned forward as Bert started to speak again.

"It's true," he said. "All of you know it. All of you have watched me step along and make money. And not once during the years have I found any jealousy among you. In fact, you were glad to see me climb."

"Don't be too sure!" cried Duffy.

"Oh, yes you were, Martin," laughed Bert. "There's not one of you who hasn't patted my back and wished me well. You're a great crowd—swell guys. But you're

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fools!" He lifted his hands to stay the growing storm he had started. The smile went and his eyes narrowed. "I mean it," he said. "You're fools! You sit back and watch me climb—you watch others climb—but have you ever thought of yourselves? Have you ever stopped to realize you are getting the same pay today you got ten, fifteen, twenty years ago? Have you done that?"

Paul touched Kay's shoulder. "Perhaps we'd better go," he said. "Lord knows what might happen tonight after that."

"We'll stay," said Kay. "Please, Paul."

Paul shrugged and shook his head. He glanced out over the crowded hall and saw men's shoulders weaving. The mass was in motion and surged slowly like the surface of the water when a storm gathers. Bert's head was up. He was pointing to Martin Duffy.

"You, Martin," he said. "For years I've heard you stand up in this hall and make speeches. You've argued for this and you've fought for that. Others have done the same. But what have you been fighting for? Do you know?" He laughed then. A short, sharp laugh that bit like a curse. "The answer is: No! You don't know. You'll never know until you wipe the mud out of your eyes and see what's going on around you."

HIS voice dropped and he crowded the platform edge as though to impart a confidence. "If Gus Blaucher were in the hall and heard us argue, he'd laugh until the fat under his chin nearly choked him. He'd hear a thousand men fighting about things that don't amount to a snap of the fingers. He'd know you were doing just as he wants you to do. He and the other contractors want you to fight. The trick is older than labor. I've been on jobs where there was no hot water for the showers at shift time. But don't you suppose the contractor knew it? Don't you suppose he realized you'd complain? And then he cut the men in the gangs—deliberately violated part of the contract with the hall—don't you suppose he knew you'd raise the roof? Of course he did! And when you finally sent Jack Flynn to him with a list of complaints, he beefed and yowled and made a great concession. He gave you back exactly what you had started with. And you went into the tunnel laughing. You'd won! Sure—you'd won. But what the blazes had you won?"

He turned then and walked to the table where a large pitcher stood on a tray near a glass. He filled the glass and put it to his lips while the men in the hall murmured. Paul looked sharply at his friend. Here was a Bert Saxon he had never expected to see. A man who was playing with words as a great musician might with notes. That first swaggering statement had accomplished its mission. It jolted the men—brought them to the edges of their seats in surprise. And while they listened Bert had put his finger on the core of their trouble. Now they wanted to hear more and Bert was making them wait.

"What is it we're all working for?" said Bert at length. "We can talk about the craft, pride in our work, the closeness of the clan and the bond of labor. Fine words. They look good in headlines and roll well from the mouth of a speaker. But boil them down and what have you got? Hokum! Words, and nothing else. You know, and I know why we work." He pointed to Terry Reardon who had gone forward to sit in the first row. "You, Terry—when you finished up today and stopped at the window for your pay envelope were you thinking how grand it is to work only with brother union men? Were you thinking of the glory of labor? Were you thinking of any of the oil you read in the papers? Not a bit of it! You were wondering if Helen could squeeze out a few dollars to get those new shoes she wants. If you could spare the price of a trip to Coney Island with your daughter. Perhaps you remembered a pipe you'd seen and wondered if it would come out of the pay envelope this week. And you, Duffy"—he pointed to the scowling Irishman—"you were wondering about your boy. He's been going away to school and next month vacation will be over. Can you send him back? Will there be enough

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money? Will he grow to be that great doctor? That's what you thought of when you drew your pay.

"But you forgot it when you came into the hall tonight. You wanted to pull a job in Jersey because men of another local were crowding in. Gus Blaucher had thrown a fistful of mud in your eyes and you couldn't see your boy any longer."

He looked along the rows of men and picked out others. Paul heard him call a mucker by name, tell of the man's dreams, his troubles, the many things he'd planned. And as he listened Paul realized Bert was drawing the men closer to him. Making each sandhog in the hall feel Bert Saxon was aware of his personal problem. It was oratory of the most subtle kind. Not the blustering, grandiose ranting of commercial spellbinders. But an intimate, homely talk by a man whose family was the oldest in the clan.

At times there was a laugh—some funny incident Bert mentioned to point up a fact. Then, while the laugh was still on their lips he spoke of Dan Hannagan lying in a hospital waiting to die while his wife and youngsters haunted the altars of the church. He told of families whose men had gone one by one into the tunnels. Some had returned with twisted legs and sightless eyes. Others had never returned. Those who were left sat facing him in the hall. He told of the closeness of the clan. Brothers, uncles, cousins working in the same heading. The long slender thread of family that bound them with ties stronger than that of craft.

AS Bert spoke Paul was conscious of a feeling of defeat. It was as though he listened to the history of a dying race. As a spectator, one who sat as a man alone, he could picture a group of gallant men who had faced an enemy with courage and patience. But the enemy was too strong. Too relentless. They couldn't win. Couldn't even hold what little ground was left to them. Each day they gave one step. Then another. Fighting—always fighting. But powerless against a ruthless enemy.

Who or what this enemy was, Paul didn't know. Nor could he guess what the men of the clan were fighting. But as Bert's words came to him over the heads of the gathered men he learned of defeat and the hopelessness of further struggle. His throat was tight and at times his teeth fastened on his lower lip. He turned to Kay and found her white-faced and taut. She was leaning forward with her head turned slightly that she might not miss a single word. Her nostrils flared to the slow steady rhythm of her breathing. Paul doubted if she knew he were in the hall—if the men were there. She was listening to Bert with a concentration that shut out all other sound and thought.

Motion came to the clan. Turbulence and a restless swaying of heads and shoulders. Men swung with the words of the quiet-voiced man before them. They laughed when he laughed. When he paused there was utter silence. As he told of the wrongs done to them a low rumbling swept the hall like the voice of a gathering tempest.

"These things are true," he said. "You know they're true. But they are also things of the past. And that past is over—finished—dead as yesterday's sunset. This is today. And it's a new day. We're going to forget those little two-cent quarrels with the contractors. We're going to laugh them off as though they didn't exist. And then—we're going out to get the one thing that can change all this. We're going to demand it. And we'll get it! The contractors will pay us with money for the flesh and blood we pour into their tunnels. Money! Did you hear that! *Money!* It's a rotten, stinking thing, they tell us. It's vile and low and the cause of this world's troubles. Sure—they tell us that. But who are *they?* Do you know? If you don't, let me tell you! *They* are the ones who have the money! *They* are your contractors—your bosses!"

Quick anger brought Paul to his feet. His eyes were hard as he faced the platform and lifted his hand for recognition. Those in the rear of the hall turned to stare. A hand touched his arm but Paul shook it aside.

"That's wrong, Bert!" he cried.

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An angry murmur arose as the men turned to stare at the contractor. There were lifted arms and clenched fists.

"Put 'im out!" yelled a miner.

"That's Touchet," cried another. "What's he doing here?"

"Another lousy contractor. Put him out!"

Bert's arms lifted. "Quiet, men," he called. And the voices were stilled. "I didn't realize we had guests in the hall—didn't think they were permitted."

"Guest, be damned!" cried Paul. "I'm a member of this local and my dues are paid! I've a right to my say."

"As a union member—or a contractor?" asked Bert.

"Either way you wish to put it."

"Sorry," laughed Bert. "They don't mix. If you'll talk as a member I'll be glad to turn the platform over to you in a few minutes. As a contractor—"

A GIANT miner moved toward Paul. He was smiling but it was a grim smile. He pointed to the empty chair and looked steadily at the contractor. "Sit down, Touchet," he said. "We'll hear from you later."

Kay's hand touched Paul's arm. "Please sit down, Paul," she said quietly.

Paul dropped into his chair and turned to face her.

"It isn't right, Kay. Bert has no reason to make a remark of that kind. I'm a contractor but I've never pulled any of that stuff about money being vile. Whatever the men asked for, they got."

"But tonight you're not a contractor," she said.

Paul's eyes were wide. "Great grief! Has he got you, too?"

When silence came to the hall Bert stepped forward from the table and smiled.

"And now, with the exception of one man in the last row, I guess we all think pretty much the same about money," he said. "The question is—how are we going to get it? And for an answer, I'll take you back to the words with which I started this talk. I told you that I, and a few others, had been successful. I told you we'd made money and would make more. But is it because we know more about our trade than the rest of you? Are we better tunnel-builders? Partly, perhaps. But not all of it. The real cause is that we are business men. And the contractors are business men. We speak the same language and use the same words. And as a result a few of us make money. The rest of you mug along—swinging your shovels, building your tunnels, sweating your guts out over the muck pile for the same old wage year after year.

"When contractors fight and go into court, do they try to represent themselves? When this local walks into a court battle does it send a miner to talk with the jury? Not a bit of it! We hire lawyers—and so do the contractors. Is there a mucker working in the emergency hospital at the tunnel-shaft? Not at all! That's the place for a doctor. Would you think of sending a man from the iron into the face to drive a shaft? Of course not! Each to his own trade—the rule is older than man. But when it comes time to talk of money, make contracts with your employers, set the wage scale and the hours of work—what do you do?"

Bert stared at the men as Paul had seen him do when a mistake had been made in the tunnel. Accusation was there, but with it a certain tolerance and understanding. Paul had always admired this trait in the superintendent—admired it even now. It brushed away any resentment a heading-boss might have when told his gang was slowing down. It sent men to the shovels with a smile and a determination to do better work. And now the effect was similar. Men waited for the answer they already knew. And Bert gave it to them.

"Each year at election you pick out a man to represent you—your business agent," he said. "And what are the requirements you've laid down for this job? Honesty—long years at his trade—a certain amount of personality and the ability to make friends. But do you demand that he be a business man? Not at all! Is Jack

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Flynn a business man? Or is he simply an honest, likable, hard-working sandhog?"

AGAIN the crowd rumbled. Faces were turned toward the rear of the platform where Flynn was seated. He was grinning and nodding his head in agreement. He pointed to Bert, mutely telling the men to listen and learn. Bert turned and walked toward him. He put one hand on Flynn's shoulder. The business agent caught his hand and shook it. And the sandhogs cheered as they beat the palms of their hands together.

"There's no hard feelings about this," cried Bert. "Jack and I have talked it over and he's with me all the way. As a heading-boss there isn't a better man in the clan. As a business agent—Jack is still a swell heading-boss."

There was laughter then. Even Paul felt the humor of the situation and turned to grin at Kay. Low-voiced comment ran through the crowd and there was more laughter when Flynn lifted the pitcher and playfully measured the distance to Bert's head.

"And now we come to the question," said Bert when quiet had been restored. "Every big contractor in the trade is going to submit his bid shortly for the new East River tunnel. In figuring this bid he must know the union scale of wages—our scale. He takes this into consideration when he sets his figure, and it is only fair to submit it to him immediately. When I asked Jack Flynn what had been agreed upon as right and just, I found the old scale had been submitted. I read the proposed contracts and found them carbon copies of the ones we've used for years."

He turned to the table and lifted a few sheets of paper. He held them up. "These are the proposed contracts, men," he said. "And this is my suggestion as to what should be done with them."

He ripped the printed pages once across, folded them and tore them again. Then he tossed the fragments into the air and laughed. Laughter followed his. There was a stamping of feet and a pounding of fists against men's shoulders. The sandhogs cheered. Yelled. Jerry Harkness, the president, banged his gavel and called for order. Kay turned to Paul and amusement was in her eyes. The contractor frowned and shook his head.

"Wait," he said quietly. "This is only the beginning. If Bert says what I expect him to say, he's digging his grave with a shovel in both hands!"

"What do you mean?" said Kay quickly.

"Wait," said Paul. "You'll understand."

"But don't you agree with what he's done?"

"That's beside the point, Kay. For a time he had me guessing—walked me right into a trap. He knew I was here—knew it the moment I came in the door. And like the clever ape that he is, he used me."

"You believe that?"

"Darn right, I do."

"But what is he driving at?" she asked. "What is he leading up to?"

"Failure," said Paul dully. "Complete and utter failure. Something's happened to Bert and made him a fool. In a few moments I think you'll agree."

When Bert had again wet his lips from the glass on the table he lifted an arm and waved it for silence.

"We're all interested in this new job," he said. "We all hope to work on it. And unless I'm very much mistaken, one of the contractors who will finally bid it in is sitting in the last row of this hall. *One* of them. His partner isn't here. His partner wouldn't dare come here. And that partner is Gus Blaucher!"

EVERY man in the hall turned to stare at Paul. Some rose from their seats. Most of them simply sat and stared. Nothing was said. But Paul felt accusation in the eyes that watched him. There came a quick desire to answer—to defend himself and tell the reason for the new partnership. He wanted to explain. But as he looked toward Bert Saxon that feeling passed. Bert, crafty in his new role of demagogue wanted Paul to speak. And whatever he might say would then be

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turned against him. Paul leaned back in his chair, folded his arms and grinned. The men turned again to face Bert.

"We all know Paul Touchet," said Bert. "A grand guy and a swell boss. Most of us have worked for him and there have been mighty few complaints on his jobs. In return, I think he will agree that few contractors have received so much work for their dollars as he. So that makes us even all around. But in hooking up with Gus Blaucher he's bringing someone into the trade who doesn't belong. Blaucher is a cheap, doublecrossing rat and we know it. As Paul Touchet's partner he becomes a tunnel-builder. And he'll bring to the tunnel all the slimy tricks he's learned. Knowing this, I again insist Jack Flynn is not the man to deal with him. And Jack, as you know, agrees with me."

He paused and turned slowly to look across the men. "Will you let me take his job?" he asked quietly. "Will you appoint me business agent? Will you let me help to draw up new contracts calling for higher wages?"

Thunderous agreement came from the sandhogs. Each man in the hall was on his feet—cheering, yelling, stamping his feet. Only Paul and Kay remained seated. Kay's face was flushed and eager. She had been carried along with Bert's words and she was beating the palm of one hand rapidly against the other. Paul's hands were still. He was slumped down in his chair, staring at the floor. Kay turned and shook his arm. She lifted her voice above the riot of sound to question him. He didn't answer.

"Paul!" she cried again. "What's wrong?"

"Everything," he said, leaning close to her ear. "He's done just what I expected. Don't you understand? Don't you realize what's happened?"

"No—not exactly."

"Bert Saxon, general superintendent and tunnel builder is dead. He committed suicide just now. Bert Saxon, penniless labor-leader, agitator and crusader has taken his place."

Kay's eyes were wide. "I—I hadn't thought," she said. "It all sounded so wonderful—so fine—"

"Words," said Paul. "In that man's mouth they become whips. But get behind them and see what he's done, Kay. A few moments ago Bert Saxon was headed toward the top. No man has ever come faster in the construction world than Bert. No man is better equipped to continue. If circumstances had not forced me to hook up with Gus Blaucher—Bert Saxon would have been my next partner. Together, we'd have rolled up a fortune. Even without me, Bert was headed toward real money. Someone—Martin & Ranger, Midland, or one of the big firms—would have taken him in. It had to happen."

"And now?" said Kay.

Paul laughed shortly. "He's gone over the fence and joined the other side. He'll fight us and we'll fight back. His future is gone and he's headed for oblivion."

CONSTERNATION twisted the corners of Kay's mouth. She caught Paul's arms and and held them tightly. Looked into his eyes. "Stop him, Paul," she said. "Please—please stop him. Make him realize what he's doing!"

"Stop him? Why should I?"

"Because he's your friend."

Paul rested an arm across the back of Kay's chair. It was as though they were alone rather than in a group of a thousand cheering men. His lips were close to her cheek when he spoke and his voice was sharp.

"Kay, I was afraid this might happen. I've felt it coming for weeks. And as Bert's friend—I'm sorry. But as the man who hopes to become your husband—"

Kay's lips were thin. "I think I understand, Paul."

"Can you blame me?"

"No." Her voice was dull. Flat.

Paul turned away. Kay had said what he wanted but the sound of the word was unpleasant in his ears. It wasn't right. Nothing was right. The whole scheme of things was twisted and bent. Bert Saxon

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didn't belong on that platform. He wasn't cut from the cloth of martyrs, Bert was a builder—perhaps the greatest of all time. His place was in a tunnel where steel and iron were forming a roadway beneath a river. Or bending over a set of blueprints whose intricate lines expressed the dreams of master craftsmen.

Paul remembered the night they had sat together in his office studying the plans of the new tunnel. A thousand problems were hidden in the curves and angles set down by the draftsmen. They must be solved, figured and priced before the bid could go in. And Bert had laughed as he pointed to each with a heavy blunt finger—laughed and told Paul the answer. Before this there had been other nights when the two men worked long hours in a silent office—planning, figuring, taking the kinks from a job under construction.

Paul recalled a time when a surging river had threatened to sweep away the the work of months. Bert had raged, then. Twin fires flared in his eyes as he led the men into the heading. Shovels and sledges had sung the song of the tunnel. Men had worked and some had died. But always in the front where danger was greatest worked Bert Saxon. And he had won. He had beaten back the river and saved a tunnel.

And so it had always been. Through the years Paul had come to depend upon this giant friend. When a foolish contract or a thoughtless bid had threatened the fortunes of his firm, Bert had talked with the men, asked them for speed. And a miracle of construction would follow. True, he had been well paid. But money was no measure of the bond that had grown between them. And now Bert wanted to destroy all this. For the sake of a foolish ideal he was about to put an end to a career that had promised greatness.

Paul stood up. The movement was involuntary. He wasn't conscious of the voice that yelled for recognition—hardly knew it for his own. A vague force was driving. He wanted to help Bert—save him from the results of his own folly as Bert had so often done for him. Bert was his friend. And that friend was making a mistake.

"Mr. Chairman!" he cried. "Mr. Chairman! I'll take those few minutes Saxon offered!"

CHAPTER XI

TWO MEN

VOICES were stilled and the sandhogs turned to look at Paul. Some laughed and pointed. Others jeered. Paul stared them down and continued his demands for recognition from the chair. Bert, standing at the forward edge of the platform, saw him. He lifted his arms.

"Quiet, men!" he cried. "Gus Blaucher's partner wants to speak."

Laughter and catcalls followed his words. There were cries of, "Put him out! We won't listen!" A few voices lifted in angry protest. On the whole, the attitude of the men was one of good-natured rebuke to a well-liked member. Paul Touchet had always been a friend of the sandhogs. He was the only contractor allowed to hold a union book—one earned through months of work on a shovel when he decided to learn the trade in his youth. As Bert had said, there had never been a quarrel between Paul and the men. Now they were inclined to dismiss his protests with a laugh.

Paul lifted his voice. "As a member of this local—not as a contractor nor partner of anyone—as a member in good standing, I'm entitled to a voice in this hall!"

"Sure, you are," laughed a mucker. "Tell 'em all about it, Touchet."

Bert grinned at the men and held his hands out, palms down in a request for silence. Jerry Harkness pounded his gavel and the voices were stilled. Paul stepped into the aisle, turned once to look at Kay and found her watching him. Her eyes questioned him. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders as though to say, "Well—here goes." Then he winked slowly and turned to face the platform.

"Far be it from me," he said quietly, "to find fault with Bert Saxon's speech. It was one of the finest ever made in this hall to

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my knowledge. If he said some things with which I don't agree—that's of little importance. But as a member of the local I'd like to ask one question. May I, Mr. Chairman?"

"Ask it," said Harkness.

"Saxon has told you he makes five hundred a week. He's told you he will soon be offered double that amount. And he's right. If I bid in that new job I'll gladly pay him a thousand to work for me. But—is this local able to pay that amount to its business agent? Can you meet my figure?"

There was silence for a moment. Men turned questioningly and looked at those beside them. A low muttering started and soon argument broke out in a score of groups. Bert's laugh brought order. It was short. Sarcastic.

"Have I asked for a thousand?" he cried. "Jack Flynn's pay was a hundred and fifty. I'll take the same!"

The men in the hall shouted. The noise that came from their throats rolled as a wave across the room. Heavy feet stamped and arms waved. And through it, Paul stood smiling—staring at Bert Saxon. In the contractor's eyes was the look that comes to the duelist when his opponent has made a mistake. He stepped forward as though to lend weight to the thrust that would finish the fight.

"You'll take a hundred and fifty?" he said. "If that is true—what are we to think of the words you've been using? A moment ago you told us *money* is the most important thing in the world. Something we all want. Something we all work to get. You claimed the money in a man's pay envelope is the only thing that sends him into the tunnel. You've proved each of us works for one thing only—*money!* And that's great! But—what about yourself?"

"I've made plenty," said Bert quickly.

"Sure you have," laughed Paul. "And a dozen contractors are willing to pay you five times as much as the union can. Why won't you accept it?"

"You know why I won't work for Gus Blaucher!"

"I'm not talking about him. What about Martin & Ranger? What about Midland, or the Johnston Construction Company? They'd give you seven hundred—any of them. Why don't you take it?"

"Are you sure you don't know the reason, Paul?"

"I'm sure that I *do!*" cried Paul. "And what's more, I believe what you said a moment ago—each of us is out to get all he can. We all want money. I do. These men do. And so do you—Bert Saxon!"

"Are you trying to say that—"

"That as business agent of this local you'll find a way to make twice, three times, perhaps ten times more than I or any other contractor could pay you. Hell—you could afford to take the job for nothing! It's the softest racket in the world!"

PAUL walked to his seat and sat down. He was white-faced and his lips were thin. But he winked to Kay and rested a hand upon her arm. Her eyes questioned him as the voices of the sandhogs lifted in rushing crescendo—muttered whisperings that gathered in volume. Miners looked at their calloused hands. Rubbed their cracked and bruised knuckles slowly against the heavy palms. Muckers and iron men leaned close and asked low-voiced questions. An occasional curse came from a whispering group. And through it Bert stood facing them from the platform. His head was up, his legs wide spread as though to take the shock of a punch. The smile was gone and he swayed slightly, hunching his shoulders as a man would to flex the muscles of his back before an exchange of blows.

"I'll give you the lie on that, Paul," he cried. "You lie as you talk—and you know it. Name the day or the place any Saxon took a penny in graft and I'll turn in my book this night."

Paul got to his feet. "Every man in this hall knows the Saxons," he said. "We know what they've done—know their record and their history. Until now the name has stood for everything fine and right in the tunnel trade. I bring no accusation

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against you, Bert Saxon. As you say, I can't name a time or a place where you ever took a dishonest nickel. But tonight you've made two statements. They don't agree! Which of them do you want us to believe?"

"Believe that I'm going to give everything I've got to bring a change to the trade of building tunnels," Bert answered. "Believe that I'm going to use all of the tricks I've learned from contractors in a fight for the men of my clan. Believe that—and tell your friends." He paused and looked out over the rows of silent sandhogs. "As for you men of my local—ask yourselves why Paul Touchet, contractor and business man, is here in this hall tonight trying to discredit me."

Paul laughed. "That's right, men," he said. "And then ask yourselves if Paul Touchet has ever doublecrossed you, failed to meet your demands, refused to pay union scale or employ union men on any of his jobs. Talk it over. Reason it out. But don't let yourselves be tricked by the smooth words of a man who would like to sell you out!" He caught Kay's hands and drew her erect. "Come on, Kay," he said quietly. "It's time to go."

Silence walked with them to the door. The sergeant-at-arms twisted the knob and stepped aside. Paul took Kay's arm and led her down the stairs to the street. He said nothing until they had reached the corner of Eighth Avenue. Then he turned to the white-faced girl beside him and smiled.

"How did you like it?" he asked.

"I don't—I don't know."

"Didn't think it would be like that, did you?"

"No. I didn't."

"I don't believe any woman can understand what fools men make of themselves when they huddle together in a large room to talk," he said. "Let's forget it and have a drink while we wait for Bert."

"Wait for Bert?" she said in surprise.

"Sure. He'll be along in a few minutes."

"But—I don't understand."

Paul chuckled and led her into a small café where there were tables set in dimly-lit alcoves. It was a half hour before showbreak and there were few people at the bar or seated at the tables. A white-coated waiter took their order and Paul passed his cigarette case to Kay. She took one with hands that were not quite steady. When the waiter set two Martinis before them Paul lifted his in jesting salute.

"Will you drink to a pair of perfect fools?" he asked.

"You and Bert?"

"Yes."

"No," she said quietly. "But I'll drink to a pair of gallant gentlemen."

"Thanks. But I think my name for us is the better."

She rested an arm on the table and looked into his eyes. "What's it all about?" she asked. "For a time I thought I understood. While Bert was talking he made it so clear—so simple. The men needed a leader and he offered to take the job. Then you told me what it would mean to him. For the moment you seemed pleased—"

"I was," said Paul. "You see, Kay—I love you. I'm conceited enough to believe you'd marry me if it were not for Bert. When I saw him stepping out of the way it was natural for me to be pleased."

"Then why—"

"Why did I fight him?" he laughed.

"Yes."

"I've told you the reason. Because I'm as great a fool as Bert, I suppose. Because I couldn't sit quietly and watch my friend dig his own grave."

"Do you believe the things you said?"

"Not at all. No more than I believe half of what Bert said."

"Then what is it all about?"

"Politics," he said. "Bert has suddenly been bitten by the crusading bug. He wants to better the conditions of the men. As their business agent he can get them more money than they've ever dreamed of—more than any man who works with his hands. In order to get Jack Flynn's job he had to put on a political hate-fest—give them the old hokum and work on their sympathies."

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"And you really think he can help them?"

"Think? I know he can. Bert knows tunnels, costs, figures and contractors. He'll be the toughest business agent ever to demand more money for his local. And as a result there will be strikes, riots, broken contracts and broken heads. When it's over and the smoke clears away Bert Saxon will be blacklisted by every contractor in the trade. He'll never build another tunnel. Then, a day will come when the union will forget him—forget the things he's one for it. And Bert will go back on a shovel to work in a drift as a miner."

Kay lifted her hand and put it to her eyes as though to shut out the picture Paul had drawn. She leaned against the table edge, pushed back her drink and looked up.

"And because Bert is your friend you tried to prevent this?"

"I suppose so," said Paul wearily. "Friendship covers a multitude of sins."

THEY were silent for a time and Kay studied the man across the table. She had never thought of Paul as she had seen him tonight. She recalled the manner in which he played for a weak spot in Bert's attack. Paul's answering thrust had been swift as the stroke of a master swordsman. Bitter. Cold. A stroke that whipped away the dream castles built by the sandhog. Doubt and distrust had grown with Paul's words. She had seen it in the faces of the men. When he spoke she heard a deliberate and cold-blooded business man tearing to shreds the reputation of an opponent. It was merciless. Cruel. For a moment the steel had shown through the velvet glove. And Kay wondered if she would ever know the many sides that went to make up the man who sat facing her tonight.

Now he had tried in few words to make clear his position and explain what had happened at the meeting. Kay knew he was wondering if he had won—if Bert would be stopped in his headlong rush toward destruction. If this had been accomplished Paul was one step further from his dream of marriage with Kay. And she was that much closer to Bert. Foolish thoughts, perhaps.

She loved Bert. And she admired Paul. But Paul didn't start a tiny pulse beating in her throat as did Bert's merest laugh. Paul's voice didn't send her eyes questing in search of a wide-shouldered, smiling giant whose hand on her arm brought a warmth to her breasts. And even as she turned these thoughts in her mind, she knew she was waiting to see Bert again.

Paul knew it, too. He nodded his head in silent understanding when Kay's eyes brightened. Bert was coming toward them. His long stride carried him quickly past the other tables and his hand was heavy as it thumped against Paul's back.

"Hello, you murderer," he said. "Isn't it bad enough to call me a crook without coming to my favorite bar to celebrate?"

"Sit down, sucker," laughed Paul. "We've been waiting for you. Kay thinks it's time you bought a drink."

"Not here," said Bert. He rested his hands on the table and grinned at Kay. "Let's bounce over to the Astor Roof and gather up some breeze."

Kay looked at Paul. "Shall we?"

"Why not?" he answered. "It's about two minutes in a cab and Bert can pay the bill. The loser buys champagne tonight, too."

"Great," said Bert. "Get ready to dig down."

"What?"

Bert's laugh was loud. "You'll find out," he promised, and drew Kay to her feet. "This fellow Touchet never won an argument in his life. He's a pushover, Kay."

Kay looked at him gravely. "I'm trying to remember," she said, "just where I've seen that homely face before. Your voice is familiar but I'm sure we haven't met in a great while."

"Oh, you must remember me," he laughed. "I'm the guy that saved his nickels to take you to the movies when we lived in Detroit."

"Have we met since then?"

"Once," said Bert wryly.

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"Of course," agreed Paul in mock seriousness. "He's the fellow that takes little girls out to play in the mud when they're dressed in evening gowns."

"Oh, yes," said Kay thoughtfully. "Now I recall. He breaks up pleasant evenings, gallops around in ditches and then disappears."

Paul had paid the check and they were walking toward the street. Bert lifted his arms as though to defend himself from a shower of blows and ran to the curb. He hailed a cab and opened the door.

"You win," he said. "I'm the guy."

Kay wondered at his mood. It was light, cheerful. Once again he was the Bert Saxon who had insisted upon jazz at a dignified musical. His laugh was the same as it had been when they had met for the second time in one evening at Paul's apartment. Certainly, not the Bert Saxon who had walked with her along the Brooklyn waterfront looking off into the sunrise as he talked of the men of his clan. Nor was it the man who had swayed a thousand tunnel-builders to the rhythm of his words. All trace of seriousness was gone. When he walked with them across the hotel lobby and handed her into an elevator his conversation was that of the smart New Yorker out for an evening's pleasure.

The head-waiter recognized him and quickly took a *Reserved* sign from a floorside table. Then clapped his hands, called to the waiters, bowed and showered service and attention upon the group. The orchestra leader waved his baton toward Bert in a friendly gesture. And the Broadway crowd at nearby tables called cheery hellos or lifted their glasses in greeting.

"You order the dinner, Paul," said Bert. "Kay and I will try out the floor. And be sure to order champagne."

He took Kay's arm and started toward the dance floor. As he passed Paul's chair he caught his friend by the shoulder and shook it. Paul looked up. Smiling.

"Do I pay for it, too?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

"They gave you Flynn's job as business agent?"

"On a silver platter, my friend. All tied up in pretty blue ribbons."

"In that case," said Paul, "I think I'll order a side-dish of ground glass for you. Or perhaps a little arsenic in the gravy."

CHAPTER XII

AND ONE WOMAN

HE BECKONED to the waiter and Bert grinned broadly as he hurried after Kay. The floor was not uncomfortably crowded and Kay was pleasantly surprised to find Bert a good dancer. There was a light sureness to his step that told of smooth flowing muscles. The arm that circled her waist was firm but not too tightly held. A slight odor of tobacco clung to his gray-tweed suit and as Kay lifted her head she was conscious of that clean, soap-and-water scent so pleasantly a part of well-washed hair. When he caught her studying him he smiled. And Kay noticed his teeth were white and even. Everything, she thought, about Bert Saxon was as she wished it. He was a man's man, yet every woman at the floorside tables turned to follow him with her eyes as they danced past.

"Do you come here often?" she asked.

"I used to. Too busy, lately."

"Were you surprised to see me at the hall?"

"Very much. I thought you told me you were through with the clan—wanted to forget all about sandhogs?"

"I meant it," she said.

He turned and headed toward an open spot at the corner of the floor, guiding her past a pair of youngsters too absorbed in themselves to watch the direction of their dancing.

"You're a funny girl," he said.

"And you're a funny man."

"Think so?"

"Of course," she smiled. "A half hour ago you and Paul were at each other's throats. Now you're apparently the best of friends."

"Oh, that—" He avoided the youngsters again. "Don't let that worry you. If he

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bids in that new job I expect to fight with him every day of the week. But we'll probably be the best of friends in the evening. I might even borrow his boat to use on our honeymoon."

"Are you and Paul going to be married?"

"Smart girl," he laughed, and deliberately bumped into the youngsters. "I'm talking about us."

"Oh—we're going to be married?"

"Didn't you know?"

"No," she smiled. "Silly of me, wasn't it?"

"Very silly. I thought you knew we were going to City Hall in the morning to get the license."

"Aren't you mistaking me for some other girl?"

He held her at arms' length and studied her carefully. Then he drew her close and rested his lips against her ear and whispered to her.

"No mistake," he said. "You're the girl."

She drew away, tilting her head back to smile at him. Then she studied him as he had done, pursing her lips and creasing her eyes.

"Sorry," she said. "You're not the boy."

"A dollar will get you ten you're wrong."

Again he kissed her ear.

"Oh, Bert be serious," she said. "You're acting like a fool and everybody is staring."

"Let 'em. The men are envious and the women are admiring the way you've fixed your hair."

"They probably think we're crazy, you loon."

"Let 'em think," he said and held her closer.

The music stopped and she stepped away as he lowered his arms. They were on the far side of the floor and as they walked between the couples Bert leaned close.

"That was really a proposal," he said. "I haven't the nerve to go through with one of those bended-knee affairs. This was the only way I could get it across."

She said nothing but turned to look at him thoughtfully. He was smiling but deep seriousness was in his eyes.

"Will you, Kay?"

They were close to the table and Paul stood and drew back Kay's chair. She thanked him, seated herself and looked squarely into Bert's eyes. Slowly she shook her head, then looked down to see what Paul had ordered as the first course of their meal.

"Been arguing?" asked the contractor.

"Not at all," said Bert. "Merely looking into the future."

"I wouldn't, if I were you," said Paul. "Not if you're actually going through with that job."

"As business agent?" said Kay.

"Yes. Bert's been handed the keys to the city. The hogs are suckers for a smooth tongue. He waited until we were out of the hall and then double-talked them into believing him."

"You didn't," said Kay. She looked quickly at Bert.

"Sure I did," said Bert. He lifted a spoonful of melon and nodded his head in approval at the taste. "But what's that to do with looking into the future, Paul?"

"Let's forget it."

"Not a chance. I want to know what's wrong with my future. Personally, I think it's going to be very interesting. Kay agrees with me. She's going to share it."

"Really?"

"Don't believe him," laughed Kay. "I turned him down cold."

"For the moment," said Paul wisely. "But you'll undoubtedly change your mind before the evening is over."

"For the first time today," said Bert, "we agree on something. Now—can you find anything wrong with the future?"

"A great deal," said Paul. "Perhaps I shouldn't say this. But in fairness to Kay—and to Paul Touchet, I will."

"Never overlook Paul," laughed Bert.

"Why should I? Especially, when I believe Paul would make the better husband for Kay."

"Does it make any difference what I think?" asked Kay lightly.

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"Not at the moment," said Paul seriously.

KAY laughed. She wanted to keep the conversation in a jesting mood. There was something in Paul's eyes that warned her he would not step aside without a last effort. And beneath Bert's smile was an earnestness more apparent for the lightness of his speech. Both men were keyed to tautness and Kay wanted to break this tension. She lifted her glass of cool *Rheinwein* and held it before her.

"Here's to the present," she said. "We'll drink to the future when it comes. And I've been told it never does."

No sooner were the words out than Kay realized she had said the wrong thing. Paul's eyes lit and he lifted his glass to touch the rim to hers. Then he turned and rang the glass against Bert's.

"To the present," he said, and touched the wine to his lips. "Let's forget that a labor leader's future is apt to be more concerned with blood than with good Rhenish wine. Let's forget that a change in leaders brings a change in methods. That strikes and riots and broken heads are the commodities he deals in. That men will starve and freeze and die at his command. That a thousand men will be at his side through the day, but that at night he walks by himself."

Bert's face was grave as he listened. His glass was rock-steady—held between fingers that were blunt and calloused. He touched it to Paul's, then lifted it higher.

"Yes—let's drink to the present," he said evenly. "But let's not forget the future when the men of my clan will come into their own. Starve and freeze and die, they may. And at my command. But they've starved before—they've frozen before—and many have died in the tunnels they've dug for you, Paul. And if I walk alone at night—as walk alone I may—at least I'll walk with my head in the stars, close up to the God I trust. He sent a Son to the world down here to help the fools He'd made. Perhaps—perhaps He'll help me, too. Perhaps—and I think He will."

Paul's voice waas low. "They killed the Son He sent," he said. "Have you forgotten that, Bert?"

"Forgotten it?" Bert's eyes were bright as the sparkling wine he held in his hand "No, Paul—I haven't forgotten."

Kay saw him staring off into space. That strange far look was in his eyes—the one she had seen when they had walked from the riverfront and Bert had pointed to the lifting sun. His hand lowered the glass and he pushed it aside. She saw his wide chest lift and fall in slow and rhythmic motion as though it were an effort for Bert to breathe. His words seemed to hang above the table where she could hear them time and again. "With my head in the stars"—it was the dreamer speaking with metered phrase, unconscious of the poetry of his words.

Facing him, Kay saw a man who looks at a friend with the sign of death on his forehead. Color had drained from Paul's face and the hand that held the glass trembled so the bright wine spilled and wet the table. Sorrow, compassion, a helpless yet wistful hope—all these things and many more Kay saw in the expressions that touched Paul's face. And turning to look again to Bert, Kay read the sign with eyes that were suddenly misted.

What it was, she didn't know. There was no definition—no tangible mark. But it was there. And seeing it she knew a sensation that was strange to her. She wanted to mother Bert. Protect him. There was an urge to step forward and place herself between the man she loved and this danger that threatened. As in a dream she heard Paul talking—telling his friend of the many leaders who had walked this path before him. Of the disappointments, trouble and eventual disillusionment that must come. She heard him picture the career of a demagogue—fights, prison, beatings and poverty. And she heard Bert laugh.

For a time the three ate as strangers. Little was said, and when the waiter poured champagne the pale golden wine was a mockery. Kay twisted the thin stem of the glass between her fingers and

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watched the tiny bubbles swell upward to burst on the surface. Then she pushed back her chair and stood up.

"Dance with me, Bert," she said. "This is my favorite waltz."

Bert grinned. "I like the idea, but what about Paul? Aren't you forgetting our host?"

"Paul won't mind."

"Of course not," said Paul, and looked wistfully at Kay. "Kay and I have danced a thousand times while you were worrying. Perhaps it's time for you to dance while I worry."

"Rather morbid, aren't you?" laughed Bert as he took Kay's arm. "What's happened to our party? I thought this was to be a celebration of my new job."

"It is," said Paul. "Enjoy it."

BERT pushed Paul's shoulder and walked with Kay to the floor. She leaned back against his arm and lifted her eyes to look into his. "Do you remember the first time we danced together?"

"Sure I do. In Detroit when your father took us to one of the sandhog picnics. I stepped on your toes and spoiled your new white shoes."

"I didn't mind."

"Not even a little bit?"

"Not a tiny bit," she said softly. "I got up early the next day and cleaned them."

"You did?"

"Yes. I was putting them out on the back porch to dry in the sun when they brought my brother home."

"Oh," said Bert quietly. "You mean when—"

"When he was killed?" said Kay. "No. This was in the morning when his wrist was broken. Later, when he heard the police were clubbing the men he went back. I went with him—ran after him."

"You were a great kid, Kay."

"I saw him when he climbed up on a box to talk to the strikers. A fight started—I don't know how. Then I heard a gun go off and Terry was—"

"Don't talk about that now," said Bert. "That was years ago."

"I can still see him there with the blood on his face and my father bending over him. And when Steve Hartley picked him up the bandage on his wrist was all unraveled and it twisted about Steve's legs."

"You mustn't think of such things. Not now—"

"How can I help it? You can't forget sights like that. It was the same when Uncle Will tried to talk with the men who were taking the strikers' places in Boston. A policeman told him to stop— threatened him with his club. Will grabbed the club and—and later in the week mother had to make over one of her black dresses for me—so I could go to the church when they buried him."

"For God's sake, Kay!" cried Bert. "Did we come here to dance?"

"I'm sorry," said Kay. "But you asked me to marry you and I thought you might like to know my reasons for refusing."

"Are those the only reasons?"

"Aren't they enough?"

"But I mean—if—" He danced slowly with her along the rim of the floor until they came to a corner near the orchestra. "It's not anything personal? If it weren't for those things you'd—"

"Perhaps."

Kay felt his arm tighten about her waist. And with the pressure came the knowledge of her power as a woman. Deliberately and with conscious effort she used it. She moved closer—leaned against Bert's chest. When they turned she brushed her cheek softly against his, remembering the subtle fragrance of the perfume she had touched to the tips of her ears. Her lips parted and she looked into his eyes. She smiled. A slow, provocative smile. Gently, and with infinite care, she moved her body closer to his. Her head was high, now. Men turned to stare and she was careful that Bert see them. Some smiled. Kay dropped her eyes, to lift them again to look at Bert.

"Like me?"

"Very much," he answered.

"Proud of me?"

"The proudest man on earth."

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She laughed and squeezed his hand. The music had stopped but Bert signaled quickly to the orchestra leader. The music started again. Bert's arm drew her toward him. She moved in, using each of the many tricks she had learned over the years. That had been fun. But tonight she was in earnest. Plying a trade that was born with woman. Making a man want her. Making him forget there was anything else in the world but the woman he held in his arms.

And soon she knew she was winning. Bert's breath was warm upon her cheek. His arm was cruelly tight. When she lifted her lips and smiled he dropped his own against hers and kissed her—forgetting the smiling couples who watched, forgetting the music, the dance—everything but Kay McLane.

"Kay—you do love me?" he whispered.

"More than anything in the world."

The phrase was old and worn to shreds. But as she said it with her lips close to his it was as though the words had been born that night.

"You'll marry me?" he asked.

"Whenever you say."

"This week? Tomorrow?"

"Tonight, if you wish."

BERT swung her from her feet and held her at arm's length. Kay was tall, almost of a height with Bert. But there wasn't a tremble in the powerful arms that held her. The orchestra leader, sensing that again the age-old question had been asked and answered, turned quickly to his men and the horns flared the first few bars of Mendelssohn's wedding march.

Bert laughed then. It was a loud laugh that carried so much joy that it found echo in a score of throats. Couples at the nearby tables stood and clapped their hands. Some, who knew Bert, lifted their glasses and called him by name. Carnival spirit caught the crowd and they cheered. And through it all Kay stood similing, one arm about Bert and her eyes lifted to his.

"Thanks a million!" he cried to the crowd. "But I can't imagine how you guessed."

He started across the floor to the table where Paul sat smiling, and a grinning waiter poured fresh wine. Hands reached out to shake his, to pat his arm or punch him playfully in the ribs. Women looked at Kay and shook their heads jestingly, or winked and wished her luck. Bert caught Paul by the shoulders and shook him.

"You were right," he said. "Kay's changed her mind."

Paul's hand went out. "The best of luck, Bert," he said. "She's much too good for you. In fact, I don't know any man but myself who could do her justice."

"For that, we won't name our first son after you," laughed Bert.

"Our first?" laughed Kay. "Such ambition!"

"When is all this going to happen?" asked Paul. "I mean the wedding and all that sort of nonsense."

"Just as soon as we finish this drink," said Bert. "I think there's a fellow in Philadelphia or Connecticut that stays open all night."

"Bless you, my children," said Paul. "But why not wait until morning and make it legal?"

"Think we can wait until morning?"

"I'll try," she smiled. "And while we're at it—I mean this waiting business—let's finish that toast we started earlier in the evening."

Bert's eyes clouded. "What do you mean, Kay?"

"To the future," she said lightly. "A future in which there will be no room for anything but happiness."

"Drink it down," said Bert and lifted his glass.

Paul's eyes met his. "I'll drink to that, Bert. And I'll drink to the day when you are to become my partner."

"Bottoms up!" said Kay and drained her glass. "And another to the day when you two build a tunnel to Europe."

Her laugh was high, feverish. It was as though she would pick up Bert and carry him along with her on the crest of a rushing wave. She mustn't let him think.

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Mustn't let him realize what he had done. And Paul was helping her. She had caught the eagerness of his words, seen the quick realization that leaped in his eyes. He was standing now, one arm about Bert and a glass to his lips. He drank the wine and took the bottle from the waiter's hands.

"And here's to the bride—a long life of happiness amidst the luxury she deserves. Jewels for her fingers, beautiful gowns and fine furs. Winters on the Riviera and summers in New York with a successful husband." He laughed and spilled wine into the glasses. "To Kay Saxon—the wife of the world's most capable builder!"

Bert's glass shattered against the table edge.

"Hold it, Paul!" he said quickly. "You're off on the wrong track, I'm afraid."

The bubble was bursting but Paul tried to carry the tempo set by Kay. "Wrong track, nothing!" he laughed. "With Kay as your wife, Bert—nothing can stop you. I'm no fool, and I know enough not to fight a winner. When you start bidding in jobs you'll run every contractor in the country ragged. But right now—before you bid in your first job—how about a partnership?"

"Grab it, Bert," cried Kay lightly. "Sign him up and I'll be the witness. Make it a fifty-fifty proposition or we'll dig up our own capital and put the Touchet Construction Company out of business."

"Fifty-fifty, it is," said Paul. "When the most successful dressmaker on Madison Avenue talks of digging up capital, I know she can do it."

Bert opened his mouth to object but Kay got in the first words. "You're right, Paul," she said breathlessly. "I was offered a quarter of a million to finance a place on Park Avenue by old Julius Garfinkle. And when—"

"Just a minute, Kay," said Bert firmly. "What's going on here?"

"A business deal. We're forming the Touchet and Saxon Construction Company. Or shall we call it the Saxon and Touchet Company?"

"Call it neither," said Bert.

"Oh—you're going to be my competitor, are you?" grinned Paul. "Won't hook up with the man who gave you your first job as superintendent."

"Quit it—both of you!" said Bert. "If you're trying to give me a good time—thanks. I like a joke but I think you're carrying this a little too far."

Paul was serious. "I'm not joking, Bert. I mean every word I've said."

"So do I," said Kay. "If you need capital to get started, Bert, there are a dozen people who will trust my judgment. They know I don't make mistakes."

"You're making one, now," said Bert. "I'm not going to be a contractor. And you know it, Kay."

"But why not? The money has to come from somewhere and you're a tunnelman."

"Certainly," agreed Paul. "Beautiful wives are expensive propositions. If you don't believe it, ask some of the men at the Sportsmen's Club. Harry Bellamy married a friend of Kay's and had to build three new hotels to support her. He used to own six but found they didn't bring in enough to keep the wolf from the door."

"Stop being an idiot, Paul!" snapped Bert. "Just because we've all had a few drinks is no reason to act this way. I'm not going into the contracting line—and that's final!"

CHAPTER XIII

DREAMS ARE FRAGILE

"IT won't work, Kay," he said harshly. "I've taken a job and I intend to keep it. All this nonsense may be amusing but it's not getting us anywhere."

"You mean you're going to work for the union even if—"

"I mean just that."

"But Bert—you can't. It isn't practical."

"No?"

"Of course not. After all, I've worked hard and built up a successful business. I started with a few dollars and lived in a furnished room. When money came, I

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learned to enjoy the things it could buy. I think I'm entitled to them."

"No doubt of that," said Bert.

"You've seen my home—met the type of people I enjoy being with. Do you blame me for wanting to continue my life along those lines?"

"No."

"And we're both smart enough to know what will happen if I make five or six hundred a week in my business while you get only a hundred and fifty in yours. Those things don't last. For some reason, they never do. It isn't right and I'm sorry. But I didn't make the rules and I know I'm not big enough to change them."

Paul nodded wisely. "You're sensible, Kay," he said. He lifted one of the small pieces of glass that had broken from Bert's hands. For a moment he looked at it.

Bert stared at the cloth. "Making it kind of tough, aren't you, Paul?"

"Just telling the truth. And Kay agrees, I'm sure."

"Naturally I do," said Kay. "I've seen it happen so often." She rested a hand on Bert's arm. "Oh, I know it sounds mercenary and cold. But we do want to be happy, Bert—we've a right to be happy. And if we use the sense and knowledge we've acquired through watching life—I know we can be happy."

A stubborn look had come to Bert's eyes. His jaw was set hard and he leaned forward.

"In other words—if I expect you to marry me, I must go out and make a thousand a week?"

"Not necessarily," said Kay. "There's no specific figure. And it doesn't have to happen within any set time. But—"

"But you expect it?"

"Don't you think I should?"

Paul reached for the wine bottles and filled the glasses. "Let's stop acting like kids," he said. "Bert will be making more in a year than you can spend in a lifetime, Kay. He can't miss."

"Thanks for the effort, Paul," said Bert. He laughed, and the laugh was cold. "It looks as though you and Kay have been trying to keep me out of trouble. Saving me from a fate worse than death, or some such hokum. I didn't get it at first. But now I do."

"Bert—" Kay's hand was tight on his arm.

Bert shrugged it aside. "I think—in fact, I know you're both sorry for me. Want to help me." He turned and caught Kay's wrist. Held it tightly. "Is that it, Kay? Is that why you were willing to marry me?"

"You're talking like a fool!"

"Oh, no I'm not! And you, Paul—you want me as a partner? Like hell, you do! You're playing the part of the good friend—trying to keep me out of trouble. And you're a grand guy. A swell pal." His words came faster and he kicked back his chair. "But I don't want your sympathy—don't need it!" He pushed Kay's wrist away and stared at her. His voice was pitched high, strained and taut. "I don't want sympathy from you, Kay. I asked you to marry me because I love you—thought you loved me. I don't want you to be sorry for me."

He was standing now and his hands were gripped about the back of the chair. His knuckles were white and the wood creaked under the strain of those wide hands. Kay's breath caught in her throat as she looked into the face of the man above her. Blue lines were sharp against the whiteness of his forehead. They pulsed and beat. His jaws worked as though he were finding difficulty in drawing breath between his dry lips.

"Don't be sorry for me," he said again. "No—don't be sorry." He backed away from the table. Stared at them. "I don't want sympathy—don't need it! Not from you, Kay. God, *no!*" He laughed. A broken, twisted echo of that great laugh that was part of Bert Saxon. "That's funny—funny! You're—you're sorry for me—"

HE turned and hurried to the door of the roof. His laugh mingled with the low whir of the violins. People turned to

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stare, then looked toward the girl who sat with her head bowed upon her arms. Paul had stood—put out his hand as though to stay his friend. Now he seated himself and touched Kay's shoulder. His voice was soft. Filled with understanding.

"He'll come back," he said gently. "Not tonight, perhaps. But soon—when he's thought and reasoned with himself. He'll come back."

Kay lifted her head. Tears had started the mascara and Paul dabbed at it with his handkerchief. Then he held the square of linen to her nose and said, "Blow." Kay tried to smile. She took the handkerchief and touched the corners of her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Paul," she said. "I'm acting like a fool again."

"Like a grand girl," he said. "One of the finest I've ever met."

"I wanted to stop him," she said. "I thought he'd realize—"

"He will, in time."

Kay shook her head. "No, Paul—it's over."

"These things happen," he said. "At the time they have a way of seeming very important. Perhaps the most important moments of our lives. But then morning comes—and night. Next week or next month you and Bert will be smiling as you recall the waiter's amazement when Bert broke the glass."

"Thanks, Paul. You're a lovely liar."

"Smile when you say that word, gal," he laughed.

She looked toward him and smiled. It was a twisted, sorry smile. And Paul caught her hand and held it tightly.

"I know how you feel, Kay," he said. "It hurts—hurts like the devil to see a dream broken. But dreams can be patched. Honestly they can."

"Not this one."

"Oh, yes it can." He turned and looked toward the doorway where Bert had walked. "Keep loving him and he'll come back."

Kay looked at the quiet-voiced man beside her. There was patient understanding in his eyes and he was smiling. And as she looked, Kay realized that not once during the evening had Paul tried to turn to his own advantage the twists in the sorry affair. He too, had asked her to be his wife. Yet his response to her attempt to change Bert's decision had been immediate. As a friend Paul Touchet had met every requirement. Now, when the average man might have tried to play upon her emotions, Paul was holding aloof. His complete dismissal of defeat—the casual manner in which he had listened while Bert told of her acceptance, and now his understanding sympathy did something to Kay that Paul had been unable to accomplish with months of attention and flattery.

Perhaps it was emotion. Kay didn't know. She didn't care. She was hurt and tired. And beside her was a man who appeared to understand and know the answers to her questions. He put her arm through his, walked slowly with her to the elevators and said nothing.

And Kay was grateful. Never had she been so at ease with a man before. Never had she found such perfect understanding. But was it only this? Was Paul simply a friend who could be trusted? Or was she seeing him for the first time in his proper light?

"You're a fine person, Paul," she said slowly.

"Thank you, Kay."

"You deserve a good wife."

"Do I?"

"Yes," she said. "One who will realize her husband is one of the finest men on earth."

Paul walked with her into the elevator.

"Careful, lady," he said quietly. "You'll have me asking that same question again."

"Will I?"

"I'm afraid you will."

"Perhaps—if you wait a few days—the answer may be—"

"You're tired, Kay," he said softly. "Tired and your mind is all mixed up. We're not going to talk any more this evening. I'm going to take you home."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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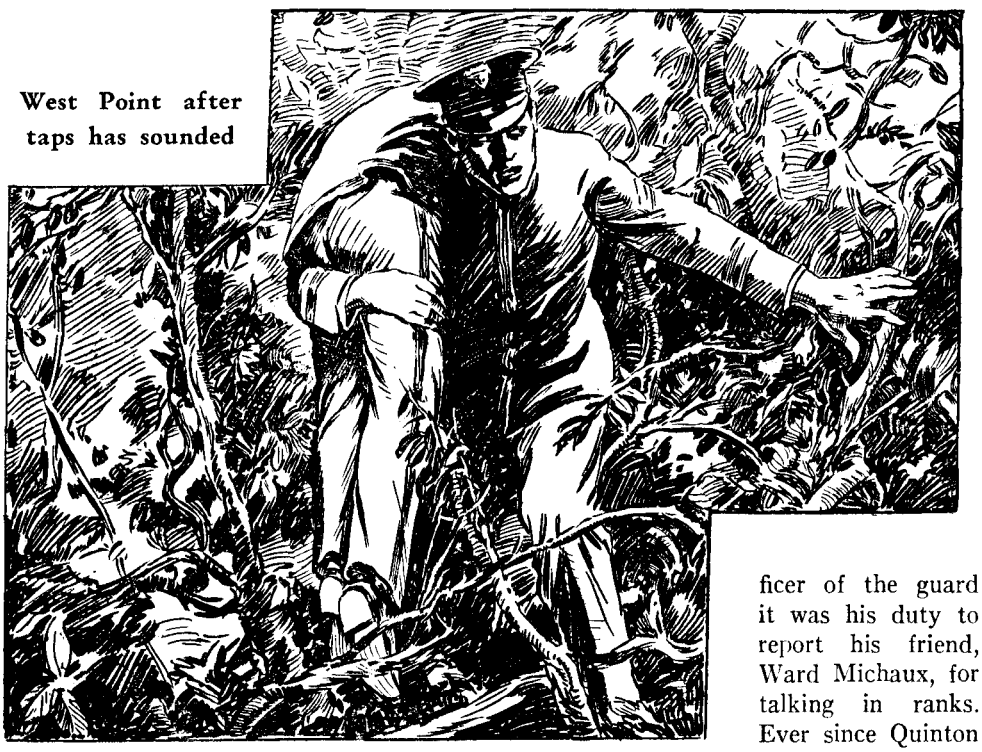
Third Classman

By PAUL R. MORRISON

Author of "Fourth Classman."



West Point after taps has sounded

Time: Autumn
Place: West Point
Weather: Chilly

CADET CORPORAL Baird Quinton clicked through the guardhouse vestibule and halted to inspect the white-gloved, white-crossbelted cadets of the punishment squad. He glanced along the wide-spaced, single file that tramped wearily back and forth across the graveled ground in front of the guardhouse—West Point's famous Area.

It was not the late afternoon, autumn sun that set a frown on his face; rather, it was the sudden realization that as an officer of the guard it was his duty to report his friend, Ward Michaux, for talking in ranks. Ever since Quinton became a third classman with corporal's chevrons and Michaux—his predecessor by one year—a second classman with a clean sleeve, a coldness had grown up between them, blighting a friendship that dated since boyhood.

In a low voice, Michaux threw the traditional information to a plebe, who, under compulsion, strutted exactly six paces ahead. Said Michaux: "The AB degree, Mister Dumbguard, may be acquired at West Point at any time before graduation. Even by a blasé plebe like you."

"Yes, sir!" Plebe Stuart Cruse, III, from Boston, sir! acknowledged in a throaty whisper.

"But," Michaux continued, "in the case of a plebe—especially a wooden one like

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you—this degree of Area Bird may not be earned without conscientious effort. So, Mister Ducrot, pull down on those shoulders and heave out on your chest! Mister Dumbjohn, make a perceptible effort—rub your shoulder blades together—got to see wrinkles in the back of that blouse!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Mister Duflicket, did I ask you for any supernumerary conversation? Did I request superfluous comment?"

"No, sir!"

"All right, then! Suck in your belly and shove your chin back under your collar—way back!"

Quinton waited until the eleven cadets—eight of them plebes—turned at Area limits and, rifles at right-shoulder-arms, marched stiffly back toward the guardhouse. While their classmates enjoyed leisure hours and holidays, these transgressors treaded gravel—an hour for each excess demerit.

"Were you talking in ranks, Mister Michaux?" Quinton asked.

Michaux's dark, fiery eyes flashed. He kept up the measured tread of the punishment squad.

"Yes, sir!" he replied.

Quinton, lips tightly drawn, made a notebook entry of the violation—another demerit for Michaux to walk off on the Area, and Michaux with enough already to keep him Area-bound till spring. The punishment detail tramped on—back and forth, back and forth. A chill wind whipping down the Hudson numbed their fingers; their arms grew stiff from maintaining compulsory, rigid attention. Long, purple shadows from the chapel struck down the autumn-colored hillside, and their souls were full of gall.

All during his severe plebe year, Quinton had looked forward to being an upperclassman with Michaux, and it cut deeply to have things turn out this way. He had hurried into his division that evening last June after plebe recognition—acceptance by the corps—treading fluffy clouds, only to find a hurt, stony-faced Ward Michaux —*Private* Ward Michaux.

AT Quinton's surprised query, Michaux had strode off to his room. Quinton started to follow, but just then some forty new, clean-sleeve yearlings descended upon him and carried him upstairs—to the sink, where they dumped him under the gushing faucet; where they, inspired by West Point tradition, rubbed shoe polish in his hair and pomade (brass cleaner) upon his fighting, naked bosom. Not until that job was done could he, in the eyes of yearling privates, become a full-fledged corporal.

Michaux had avoided him since that day. It was bad enough to fail to become a "make"—cadet officer—during his yearling year, but to have a yearling, his own plebe and friend, become corporal of his squad, was sorely galling. He had muttered angrily, "There're too many high-ranking yearlings around here to suit me!"

Which outburst, if Michaux could have listened back over a long line of cadet gray, was an ancient one, come down through the years. Many an upper-classman of the dim past had swallowed his Adam's apple and stared bug-eyed at some erstwhile plebe suddenly bloomed into chevrons, wondering at the way of the Moguls whose magic touch had made him a cadet officer.

After supper, more fuel fed the flames. Quinton and his roommate, Yearling Clay Thorpe, paused to watch Michaux brace Plebe Stuart Cruse, III—force him to stand at extremely rigid attention. They gazed approvingly upon Michaux's handiwork.

"Mister Ducrot!" Michaux snapped. "Ancestry doesn't count at West Point! Heave out on that chest and pull your chin inside your collar! You may be Mister Stuart Cruse the Thu'd around deah old Boston, but you're just a plebe here!"

Quinton smiled. The lot of a plebe was hard. He'd gone through it himself; so had Michaux and Thorpe. He moved on, but halted when Thorpe gripped his arm. His blue eyes opened wide—Michaux held a burning cigarette close to the plebe's chin.

Quinton said: "I don't believe I'd do that, Ward."

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Michaux whirled. "What!"

Silence. Save for the heavy, strained breathing of the bracing plebe. Michaux flicked the ash from the cigarette, took a deep drag on it. When the end glowed bright red, he blew the smoke toward Quinton and Thorpe and again held the cigarette close to Plebe Cruse's chin. Exhorting the plebe to haul his chin back inside his collar, he gradually eased the burning end nearer and nearer. Already the victim's chin lay flat against his collar bone.

"Ward!" Quinton's voice pierced the goading harangue like the thrust of a bayonet.

Michaux spun about—to glare into Quinton's cold, immobile eyes.

"I suppose, Baird," Michaux snarled, "you'll find some way to report me for hazing! That'd mean only six more months on the Area!"

"No, Ward," Quinton replied. "I'm not on duty now."

"Well, then," Michaux blazed, "if it's none of your business, why are you hanging around?"

"You're going a step too far here."

"Is that so? And you're the judge? Corporal Quinton! Run along now and report me for smoking a cig against the rules!"

"Listen, Ward, can't you see I was on duty this afternoon? I *had* to report you. This is different."

"Oh, yeah!"

"It couldn't make any difference whether it was you or Thorpe or this plebe. Neither you nor the next fellow can alter a West Pointer's duty. Why, man, that's the first word in our motto—on your cap—*Duty, Honor, Country!* It's the first thing you drilled into me yourself when I entered the academy."

"Quite a little speech, don't you think, Thorpe?" Michaux swung to the still bracing plebe, who, though the hall was chilly, sweated profusely. "Mister Ducrot, you're not half trying! Quit holding your breath so your face'll look red! You can't get out of bracing! Here, this'll help you!" He shoved the cigarette still closer. "Always willing to help a plebe. I'm generous that way!"

Terror gleamed in the fourth classman's half-shut eyes.

"Ward," Quinton reminded in a low, dangerous voice, "I told you I was off duty. This is on a personal basis—man to man!"

His left arm hooked out with the suddenness of the wrestling instructor's "demonstratin' holt" and spun Michaux about. His right fist swung back, hung poised.

THE clank of a sword against the iron stairs halted the blow. In an instant, every man present, including the plebe, scurried from sight. When the Tac—officer of the tactical department—popped in for a surprise inspection, every cadet was in his room.

Inspection over, Quinton sat down to study, but the words were mere blurs. He could focus neither his eyes nor his mind. He set his elbows upon the table and rested his head in his palms.

Clay Thorpe said: "He's not worth it." And went on puffing his long, punch-dipper pipe.

"A fellow you've known since grammar school?" Quinton slowly shook his head.

Thorpe hoisted his feet from the table top and knocked the ashes from his big pipe. "Here, gloom," he said, bashing Quinton's hat down over the corporal's head, "we're going to the post movies. Why study on Saturday night? I never do."

Quinton smiled, got up. "So I see from the quill list."

They were just swinging onto the stairs below when a grinning face poked around a door-facing and emitted a single guttural sound. The face vanished. Thorpe looked at Quinton and Quinton looked at Thorpe. Thorpe smacked his lips. They spoke together.

"Boodle!"

Quinton added: "Didn't know the underground railway was doing much freighting these days?"

"Saw a couple of janitors and a kaydet

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conferring in the basement early this week."

Arm in arm they marched inside the darkened room. A soft glow shone down a trouser leg fastened skillfully around the lighting fixture in the ceiling. Dimly illuminated, a dozen or more cadets sat in a circle about a table loaded with regulation water bucket, cake, candy, and divers other confections.

"Ah!" murmured Clay Thorpe, lifting a brimming dipper from the water bucket. "I detect the sundry subtleties that only a genuine kaydet can concoct! Hive the alliteration, young gentlemen; might keep you from fessin' up cold in P-Holt's English section."

"Blasphemy!"

"Traitor!"

"What I want to know," another voice growled, "is how the 'k' in 'kaydet' can alliterate with 'can cancoct'?"

"Here," Clay Thorpe offered his dipper, "take a swig of this and your speech will alliterate with almost anything, including—"

"Enough!"

"Throw him out!"

"What's in this stuff anyhow?"

"Let us hear from Corporal Quinton! He's a chemistry expert."

"Yea! Yea! Let us hear from Corporal Quinton! Yea, Corporal!"

Quinton held up a hand, "Fiends, boodlers, countrymen, I come—"

"Nothin' doin'! No *country*men stuff for me! My podunk's next to the largest city in the world!"

"Yeah, sure! Yonkers! It's next to New York!"

"Hear! Hear!"

"Corporal Quinton!"

"This foul witches' brew," Quinton informed them, "appears to contain general admixtures of the following, divided into two main classifications: from the mess hall, transported via the sleeve and cuff route—apples, oranges, bananas, grapes, sugar; via the underground railway—grape juice and—ah, young gentlemen, do I detect the juices of the fruits of tree and vine from the four corners of the earth? I do detect."

"Yea, boodle!" rumbled low and beastly from every throat. And, in cadence, repeated: "Yea, boodle!"

"Mister Dumbguard," an upper-classman addressed a plebe sentry by the door, "what will you say if a Tac clanks in downstairs?"

"I will say 'Fore!' sir!" Stuart Cruse, III, replied.

"With pathos or humor?"

"Neither, sir! With alarm, sir!"

"A loud alarm?"

"No, sir! A careful, well-intoned alarm, sir!"

"Do you expect, Mister Dumbguard, to get any of this boodle?"

"No, sir!" Stuart Cruse, III, Boston blueblood, answered promptly.

"Do you realize, Mister Dumbguard, that no West Pointer ever tells a lie?"

"I—I—that is, sir, I—"

"Let's hear from Corporal Quinton on this subject!"

"Yea, Corporal!"

WARD MICHAUX rose suddenly from the floor and edged through the packed room, forcing his way angrily. "I've had enough!" he snapped. "Let me out of here!" A quick, throttling silence choked down. Michaux pushed through the doorway. He flung back:

"I've got boodle that is boodle!"

He slammed the door behind him. His footsteps clattered on the stairs, died out above.

"What's eatin' him?" a cadet asked. "Thought he was all for this boodle party."

"Shut up!" Clay Thorpe ordered. "Don't be so wooden!"

The boodle party went on, but much of its joyous abandon had vanished. A cadet here and there forced a remark, got a follow-up, but after a short time everybody settled down to the job of consuming the contraband.

"I think," Quinton announced, "I'll go up to my room."

He edged toward the door, but several

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cadets barred his way. One of them said: "Don't let that guy get your goat!"

"Thought I'd investigate his remark—about boodle."

"To heck with him! Let him eat his own selfish boodle!"

"It isn't that—I'm afraid—well, I didn't like the way he said it. I'll be back to help clean up this mess and—"

"Fore!" the plebe at the door gave the alarm.

"Where're those laundry bags! Here, dump this!"

"Take some of it with you! You've all got laundry bags! Don't stick me with this stuff—here, you deserters, nobody goes out this door till they show they're loaded!"

"Report, Mister Dumbguard! Do your duty! And don't wait for the return of the Mayflower!"

"Yes, sir! Inspecting last room below, sir! Fore! Fore! Fore!"

"Beat it, Mister Dumbguard!"

Quiet settled over the division.

Stealthy, quick footsteps. Quinton's door eased open, and one of Michaux's roommates whispered huskily, "Michaux got some whisky through a janitor and—he's drinking like a souse—"

"Take it away from him!" Quinton hurried forward. "Hide it!" He halted. "Quick, the Tac's coming up the stairs!"

He stepped back by his study table. Thorpe maneuvered into a good position for standing at attention—where his shoulders could rest against the wall.

Quinton whispered: "He'll get an awful slug! Maybe kicked out of the academy! Liquor's one thing West Point just won't stand for!"

"Heard him say," Thorpe whispered back, "five more demerits would find him deficient in discipline."

"Don't!" Quinton begged. "And all because I get a 'make'! I've a notion to rip off these corporal's chevrons!"

"Shh!" Thorpe hissed as the Tac's boots thumped just beyond their door. "Maybe he won't inspect Michaux's room! Judging from that Tac's speed, he's skipping some of 'em tonight."

Knock! Knock!

THE Tac's knuckles cracked sharply, close together in practiced rhythm, which included as usual the turning of the doorknob with the other hand and throwing the door inward simultaneously with the last knock. Cadets Quinton and Thorpe clicked their heels and stood at attention while the Tac searched quickly around the room.

"Dirty washbasin, Mister Thorpe!" he announced tersely, and made a note of the offense which would mean a demerit when the gig list—bulletinized indiscretions—was posted. Satisfied with his inspection, the Tac swung from the room. Thorpe peered into the washbasin and sighed.

"Glad he didn't look any closer," he whispered. "That's not water I left in that pan; it's a whole spoonful of boodle! We used my basin to mix—"

"Ugh!" grunted Corporal Quinton, and held up a hand for silence. They strained their ears to listen.

"Plebes' room down the hall," Thorpe said. "He's giving Mister Cruse the Third a lesson in how to fold socks!"

"Listen!" Quinton cautioned. "If he goes in Ward's room—he's coming—six month's slug anyhow!"

"Well, make up your mind, Mister Tac!" Thorpe muttered. "Probably writing down that plebe's sins." He cocked an ear toward the door. "By L'Ecole Polytechnique, he's going down the stairs!"

Thorpe did a highland fling around his table, and under his breath began to sing:

The Army's coming down the river,
The Army's got the goods today.
The Navy's goat begins to shiver and quiver
When the Army's mule begins to bray—
HEE HAW!
When the Army's mule begins to bray.

He swung into the second verse—without audience. Quinton was already bounding across the hallway, where, as Thorpe joined him, his way was barred by Michaux's white-faced roommates.

"Stay out!" one of them rasped from a

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dry throat. "Quinton, you'll only make—"

Snatches of incoherent song broke from the room—excerpts from West Point's famous ballad, *Benny Havens*:

Come fill your glasses, fellows,
And stand up in a row,
To sing sentimentally
We're going for to go;
In the Army there's sobriety,
Promotion's very slow,
So we'll sing our reminiscences,
Of Benny Havens, Oh!

"We've got to stop that!" Quinton shoved one of Michaux's roommates aside, but the other held him back.

"Not you!" the cadet pleaded. "You'll only make matters worse! Please!"

Michaux's voice stopped, but only to swing thickly into *Army Blue*.

He paused, laughed bitterly, and shouted: "Oh, yeah!"

Quinton asked: "Can you get him to bed before taps?"

"We'll have to! Some way!"

"If you need help, call me." Quinton headed slowly back to his room, but Thorpe remained behind.

In a few minutes, Thorpe entered and said, "I think they'll make the grade. Listen, gloom, it's not your fault! Buck up! When a man—"

Something in Baird Quinton's eyes stopped him. He shrugged his shoulders, sat down. He hoisted his feet on his table and began to fill his coast-defense-gun pipe. The evening wore on—Thorpe thrust his pipe stem toward the clock.

"Almost ten," he remarked, and quickly they changed to their pajamas.

"I'll go across and see—" Quinton got no further. One of Michaux's roommates opened the door and announced: "We've got him in bed."

The cadet vanished.

"Well," Thorpe commented, "that's that! Now, if—"

The sudden thump of a drum out on the Plain. Taps!

"Lights out!" bellowed the sub-division inspector. "Lights out!"

Quinton snapped the switch. Instantly every light in cadet barracks winked out.

Immediate inspection—the lights flashed on, flashed off. The sub-division inspector's footsteps died away. Silence.

West Point was put to bed.

THE shout woke the entire third floor of the division. "Michaux's gone!" Quinton rushed into the hallway. Verifying the truth of the outcry, he plunged back into his room and dressed.

He strode toward the stairs, threw over his shoulder, "I'm handling this! Keep quiet!"

He left them like that, too dumbfounded to move.

In the lower hallway, in the shadows beside the entrance to the division, he paused to peer across the deserted Area. The cadet guard having been dismissed after taps, there would be only the regular army watchmen on patrol. The night was dark, and beyond the hulk that was the guardhouse darkness shut down with smothering finality.

He slid along the wall of the barracks, paused at a sally-port, and only breathed normally when, five minutes later, he was hurrying through the woods back of the chapel. He knew that he need use no great care now. The chances of detection would be slight if he kept to the hills. He knew where he was going here, and until he crossed the limits of the reservation a general direction would suffice. Afterward—he didn't want to think of that. His cadet clothes? He'd have to use the road—a part of the time at least.

Suppose he met a car—didn't get out of the road quickly enough? An army officer returning from New York—or towns south of the Point. Where would Ward go? In olden days cadets—Highland Falls—Benny Haven days . . . But Ward would be too smart for that—Quinton traveled fast.

Outside the reservation, he circled quickly into the highway. He ran. When his breath rasped hard, he slowed to a walk. Headlights of an oncoming car glim-

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mered momentarily beyond, and he plunged into the woods, kept on—he couldn't hurry much for the brush, but he must keep on. . . .

He crashed again into the road. If he could get Ward back before reveille— If —there must be no *if!* He broke into a long, fast trot. The headlights of another car scooped out the darkness. This time he lay behind a huckleberry bush to wait until the car had passed—he would make more time that way than fighting through the brush. The car swept around a curve, its headlights dancing along the trees. He ducked his head, squirmed further under cover. But then he froze. Full in the path of those headlights staggered a man in West Point uniform! Ward Michaux!

The car sped toward the cadet, swerved aside. Its tires wailed as the brakes clamped down. A hundred yards up the road, beyond Quinton, it ground to a shrieking stop.

"Wait here, driver!" an army officer's crisp voice barked. "You, Sergeant! With me!"

Already Quinton raced madly down the road toward Michaux. He came upon him suddenly, standing stupidly staring at the red eye of fire that marked the tail light of the halted car. His eyes cocked quizzically toward Quinton.

"Ward?" Quinton announced his presence in a low voice.

Michaux broke out in a wild laugh. He began to sing:

To our kind old Alma Mater,
Our rock-bound Highland home,
Hic-hic-hic-never fail—drink t'er
And Benny Havens, Oh!

Quinton drove his right fist just below the junction of Michaux's ear and jaw—and caught him as he fell.

He had hated to hit Ward, but something told him that this was no time to vacillate. This was a crisis—this night would determine Ward Michaux's entire future. It was like a battle—a fellow had to act quick, do what he thought best—even if it meant hurting someone. These thoughts flashed through Quinton's mind as he got a grip around his friend's legs and picked him up.

Hoisting him, life-saving fashion, over his shoulder, he stumbled into the brush and pitch-black darkness. It seemed to him that the autumn leaves were knee-deep. They seemed to impede his progress that much. And it seemed that every fallen twig and branch got under his feet to snap like rifle fire. It was a question of whether the officer and the sergeant could trail as fast as he could stagger along under his heavy load.

He hesitated, heard the crackling of underbrush behind him, then stood breathing heavily in the silence, for the others had paused to listen, too. They were waiting to get a bearing on his direction. He kept absolutely immobile.

"Driver!" the officer shouted. "Come here!"

AN IDEA took violent hold of Quinton's mind. Blood throbbed in his head. His temples pulsed fiercely. His neck stiffened. Did he dare! And if he did, could he get away with it? He had no time to deliberate, for Michaux chose that moment to groan loudly, giving away their position.

The brush crackled as the officer and his men crashed through it. Quinton paid no heed to noise now—he lunged for the road. The driver suddenly circled in ahead of him, but got tangled in a brier thicket, evidenced by an outburst of oaths. Quinton swerved to one side and plunged on. He reached the road while the driver still made wild and profane efforts to free himself.

The officer cracked out, "Have you got him?"

"No, sir! I'm just tangled up in these briars! I'm—"

Silence. Quinton, straining every muscle, tiptoed up the road toward the car. He halted within a few feet of it, listened. If there were other men in it, the game was over! He edged a little closer, found the

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doors open. Michaux moaned, tried to twist free.

Quinton clapped a hand over the cadet's mouth, and took a fresh grip with the other. Reason told him that had anyone been in the car, they would have challenged by now—he dumped Michaux into the darkened tonneau and climbed into the driver's seat. He didn't dare slam the doors until—he shoved out the clutch, shifted to low gear—fed gas to the motor! Shouts behind him! He shifted to intermediate—high. The terrific roar of the car down the highway drowned out a chorus of angry commands and shouts and much profanity.

Several curves later, he slackened until he could slam shut the doors, then built the car into space-eating speed. He had time to think a little then and soon comprehended just what sort of hornets' nest he had prodded. If he could make the reservation—if—he wouldn't dare drive in.

Nor did he. He pulled off the road before he came to the gates, and had a hard job dragging the now revived, and hilarious Michaux from the rear seat. He was almost exhausted and despaired of success when Michaux suddenly got the idea that Quinton was a drinking pal. He put an arm around Quinton's shoulder and began to sing, *Benny Havens, Oh!*

"Wait!" Quinton tried. "We're not there yet!"

"Not at Benny's—yet!" Michaux stammered. "Thought we—oh, well, lesh sing anyway! *With room enough beshide our graves for Benny Havens, Oh!*"

"Fore!" Quinton whispered in Michaux's ear.

The ruse worked. And by the time he had led him staggering up the hillside, Michaux forgot to sing. He went docilely along then until they climbed through the reservation fence. After that he muttered a little, sang some, and mumbled nasty things about high-ranking yearlings and dumb Moguls. Quinton paid no attention. He even encouraged the speech, for as long as Michaux talked he couldn't sing.

And thus, staggering, reeling, they came to the barracks again. By now, Michaux was too stupefied even to mutter, and Quinton was too exhausted to help him upstairs to his room. He leaned heavily against the front steps, jerked himself alert—it seemed that every cadet in the division was bobbing out of the darkness. Eager hands lifted Michaux and rushed him to his room. Wobbling between Clay Thorpe and another cadet, Quinton followed. Upstairs, someone held a dipper of water for him. He drank greedily—felt a little better.

He glanced into Michaux's room at a beam of light that shone discreetly down through a trouser leg upon certain swift operations. Husky cadets were all but drowning Second Classman Michaux in a bucket of water, shoving his head into it again and again full beyond his ears.

Quinton turned toward his room, knowing that the job was done. There wasn't a man here who wouldn't stay with Michaux until—

"Where's his hat?" Thorpe asked.

Quinton stiffened, halted. He revolved on tired legs.

"He had it when I saw him against the car lights," he reasoned wearily. "But when we got to the car—no, he didn't—that hat's back there in those woods!"

"Car? Lights? Woods?" Thorpe asked in rapid succession.

Quinton ignored him. He stumbled down the stairs.

"Baird!" Thorpe called, rushing after him. "He's got another lid!"

"Sure! But his name's in that hat!"

THE moon rose just as he crossed the boundary of the reservation. Floundering, tripping over brush, he kept to the woods, fearing the highway. Somehow, through the remainder of the night, slowed to plodding, short steps, he reeled on, found the telltale cap, and staggered, exhausted, back to the reservation.

He walked in the open then, no longer caring whether he got caught—he simply had not the strength to fight the brush of the woods. He did take care, however, to circle up the hill behind the chapel, and was dragging himself down again when

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reveille sounded, echoing down the valley.

He halted. If he went on now, he would be seen instantly. If he waited until afterward, until the cadets returned to their rooms to prepare for breakfast, he could --well, being absent from reveille wouldn't be as hard to explain as to go bobbing up out of the brush now. He waited.

But the powers-that-be were against him. He heard the "All present accounted for, sir!" report go down the lines until his own company reported.

"Cadet Corporal Quinton absent, Sir!"

The company captain swung about, repeated: "Cadet Corporal Quinton absent, sir!"

The report went on up. The Officer in Charge held the company at attention, dismissed the others. He clacked rapidly across the Area, and Quinton saw that there would be nothing gained by waiting. He lumbered down the hillside and zigzagged on unsteady legs over the crunching gravel. He saluted the astonished Officer in Charge.

"Cadet Corporal Quinton reporting, sir!"

"Where have you been?"

"Do I have to say, sir?"

The officer stared at him, slowly inspected his briar-scratched face, his bedraggled uniform.

"Go to your room and get yourself properly dressed! Then report to me at the guardhouse!"

"Yes, sir!"

Quinton had just reached the third floor when his company was dismissed and came thundering inside. Feet pounded on the iron stairs. He barely had time to get Michaux's cap from under his blouse and hang it in place before the room filled with cadets. Michaux, slit-eyed and hard-faced, shoved them roughly aside.

"Baird!" he called, crashing through the crowd.

He strode forward and grasped Quinton by both shoulders. Quinton gripped Michaux's elbows. They stood like that then, staring into each other's eyes. Quinton grinned. Michaux's lips trembled--he tried to speak, failed. His fingers dug into Quinton's shoulders. Quinton began to pat Michaux's elbows. They said nothing.

The crowd melted away.

A CHILL autumn wind cut down across Trophy Point and swept the dust from beneath the feet of a few Area Birds.

"The AB degree, Mister Dumbguard," growled Second Classman Ward Michaux to Plebe Stuart Cruse, III, who strutted perforce exactly six paces ahead of him, "may be acquired at West Point at any time before graduation. Even by a blase plebe like you."

"Yes, sir!" Plebe Stuart Cruse, III, replied, and executed a beautiful brace, which flattened all the protruding parts of his anatomy into one compact, unified whole that stuck up from the earth in absolute perpendicularity.

"But, Mister Ducrot," supplemented *Private* Baird Quinton, tramping the punishment squad in rhythm exactly six paces behind Michaux, "a plebe has to earn it by conscientious effort, so get that chin in out of the weather and suck in your belly."

"Yes, sir" replied Plebe Cruse, complying.

"But, Mister Ducrot," Michaux informed him, "only a cadet officer can also earn the degree of BA—like Mister Quinton for example. Know what that means, Mister Duflicket?"

"Yes, Sir! Busted Aristocrat, sir!"

"Pull in your chin!"

The punishment detail reached the end of the Area, and its white-gloved members dragged their feet back in the other direction. Michaux, turning, grinned into Quinton's face. He got an answer in kind. They tramped on across the Area, still grinning each to himself, for there was understanding between them again.

"Some day, Baird," Michaux mumbled in an undertone, "I'll make up for those lost chevrons! Don't you ever think I'm going to be indebted to you for life, and you can ditto that on the gig sheet!"

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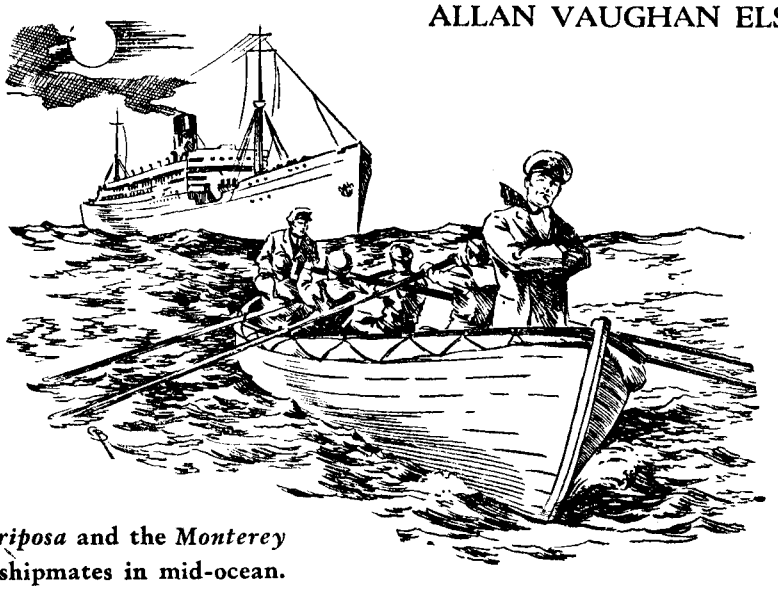
Pacific Passage

By

ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON



The *Mariposa* and the *Monterey* change shipmates in mid-ocean.

WHEN the room-steward's body was found, SERGEANT HONUAPO came aboard the *Montcrey* in Honolulu harbor and the liner continued South for Pago Pago. Earlier a batch of unopened mail had been stolen from the suite of OTIS POPE, world-famous consulting-engineer and handsome bachelor. That the theft and the murder were linked was first proved when one of Pope's stolen letters was found under the steward's body. It was a wedding invitation from HARRIET DOW in Australia. She was going to marry a Mr. Spragg. LAURA GILMAN, touring American school teacher was changing her dress before going up to tell Pope that she had seen a hand throwing torn letters from a port hole. As she sat at her dressing table she was murdered. And later, when Pope strolls on deck with JUNE DARROW, Laura Gilman's friend, someone takes a shot at him.

THERE are three men who have a motive for murdering Pope. They are: ENGLE, who nurses a grudge against Pope because of an old lawsuit. ASHURST, who has a scapegrace son being held for homicide in Suva. Pope has been asked to identify him when the *Monterey* arrives there. Then there is KAREN ROSSMORE, lovely half-caste, who adds an exotic touch to the murder mixup. She has been seen tampering with the lock on Pope's door just before he came aboard at Honolulu. And, for male-suspect number three, we have LENNOX. Lennox is an old acquaintance of Pope's. And Pope knows him to be a married man. But when Lennox's cabin is given a routine search a picture of Harriet Dow, the Australian bride-to-be is found in a watch case. Earlier an unclaimed radiogram has been received by the *Monterey* from Miss Dow, addressed to her fiancee, Spragg; and no one named Spragg is on the passenger list. It is Pope's guess that Lennox is going to commit bigamy and marry heiress Harriet Dow under the name of Spragg. Since Pope knows Lennox and has been invited to the wedding, this gives Lennox a motive. But all of these men were in a poker game the night Pope was shot at. Seeking to test this alibi, Pope gets in a poker game, leaves for a moment and returns. No one in the game has missed him, so he takes the poker alibi lightly.

This serial began in the Argosy for November 6th

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JUNE DARROW distrusts Pope's Chinese secretary, DR. MINGO—and with some cause. Mingo, a Chinese Nationalist, has been falsifying Pope's mining reports, causing American capitalists to invest millions of dollars in China. Aiding and abetting Mingo in this scheme is a mysterious gentleman now traveling aboard the *Monterey*. This man, who calls himself JULIAN BENEDICT, is a hunchback some of the time and a normal young man the rest of the time. He has bought stock in the worthless properties for which Mingo has forged encouraging reports and stands to make huge profits when the capital comes in. He wants to continue the scheme, and when Mingo refuses he threatens to kill him. After Mingo's visit "Benedict" enters a cabin, grasps its sleeping occupant by the throat and tells him that he has seen him try to put poison in Pope's demitasse. He warns him to lay off Pope.

POPE has discovered that all the copies of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* brought aboard at the island port have disappeared. Feeling there must be a clue to the mystery in this incident he finally locates a copy of the paper in the cabin of BORIS GETMAN—one passenger who seems to have no motive for murdering anyone. But Pope can find no clue in the paper. But he makes a disturbing discovery of another sort. . . . June Darrow has told him that Laura Gilman, the murdered school teacher, was only a shipboard acquaintance, but on the flyleaf of one of Miss Darrow's books is evidence that she has visited Laura Gilman and her family in the United States. As the *Monterey* steams South, her sister ship, the *Mariposa*, is steaming North in the same ocean lane. Aboard the *Mariposa* is that grasping octopus of the South Sea commerce, and former suitor of June Darrow, ELLERY CROTCHET. While he is making arrangements to transfer to the *Monterey* in mid-ocean so that he can confer with Pope on a mining deal, Pope's telephone rings and a voice asks for Mingo, then the caller hangs up as Pope identifies himself: "Mingo . . ." Pope muses ". . . I wonder . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

GRANDSTANDER

AS the hour of ten o'clock approached on that third evening out of Honolulu, nearly all of the *Monterey's* first-class passengers assembled on the boat deck. A subdued excitement gripped them. Piper and Smullet (the two traveling newsreel photographers) were there, setting up cameras. The epic action of two great liners stopping alongside each other in mid-ocean, to transfer a passenger, was a spectacle not to be missed.

The ship's band took station in the tennis court. The dance pavilion, the bar, lounge and all public rooms on A deck were practically deserted. Everyone sought the highest vantage possible in order to look ahead for the lights of the *Mariposa*.

Stem to stern on every deck, the *Monterey* herself was blazing. Still at full speed and accurately on her charted course to Samoa, she rode through the night like a house of ten thousand candles to keep tryst with a sister of the seas.

The radio room had been crackling for the last hour and Captain Jansenn, on the bridge, knew within a minute when he would sight the other ship.

Julian Benedict, tonight, was Julian Benedict. He stood aft on the boat deck, watching the crowd forward. Aloof between the davits of a rear lifeboat, few noticed him there. Madame Garaud, the opera singer, did notice him there as she passed with her rotund and pompadoured little manager. "Goot evening, Herr Benedict."

Otis Pope and June Darrow came up the companion from the pavilion balcony and hurried forward. As they went by, Benedict could have touched them with his cane.

Then came a slight black figure in a long robe, Dr. Mingo.

Benedict called to him softly and Mingo stopped.

"By now they are hiring diggers in China, Dr. Mingo."

Mingo answered stolidly. "That is all I wish, Mr. Benedict."

"Betray no secrets, then," Benedict advised. "And one thing more, Dr. Mingo. On this ship I may be questioned. Should I need an alibi for any time or place, I shall name you, Dr. Mingo."

Mingo stared for a moment. Without answering, then, he folded his arms and walked sedately on down the deck.

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Benedict looked after him. He was almost, but not quite, sure of Mingo. If Mingo weakened, he must use force. The force, Benedict remembered, was a .45 Colt's now hidden in an empty cabin. No reason he couldn't retrieve it now. His own cabins, both of them, had been searched, and so should not be searched again.

"There she is!" yelled a voice forward. "The *Mariposa!*"

Hundreds of eyes looked ahead at a point of light now visible on the horizon.

Telegraphs jangled. On the bridge Jansenn shouted: "Half speed, and all hands look sharp. We'll point to pass her two lengths starboard."

Benedict could feel the ship slowing down.

Ahead down the dark highway of sea one light became ten. Ten became a hundred and soon ten thousand. The *Mariposa* took shape. She too was slowing down, coasting with caution to meet the *Monterey.*

Searchlights flashed out from each ship, carving fantastic patterns on the sea.

"Ought to make a peach of a newsreel, eh, Piper?" Smullet said as he turned the crank of his camera.

"You never know your luck," agreed Piper.

Nearby the buxom Mrs. Royer exclaimed: "I think it's thrilling! Who is this Mr. Crotchet, anyway?"

"Biggest fish in the pond, down this way," a man told her.

The brilliance of the *Mariposa* came nearer, like a light-laden argosy bursting in majesty from the night.

"Look! They're almost opposite now."

Motion was barely perceptible on the *Monterey.* Searchlights exposed a similar gallery of spectators on the top deck of the *Mariposa.* Faint cheers came from them. The brassy cadence of the *Mariposa's* band came across, sounding, "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean."

IN a minute more both ships were stopped, floating there like resplendent castles barely two lengths apart.

The tropic sea made a mirror between them.

"She's lowering a boat," someone cried. Benedict, from his position aft, could even hear the whine of davits as a bos'n's boat was lowered from the other ship.

"There he comes—Ellery Crotchet."

Pope, with June at his side, could see the tiny boat being oared toward them along a lane of light. Four oarsmen, a bos'n, Ellery Crotchet and his baggage.

Salvos from two bands sped Crotchet on his way. Passengers from two ships cheered him as he stood there, in the small boat, with his arms folded. A beam of light played on his face. Pope could see complacence there—and monumental vanity.

"He thinks," June said with disdain, "that he's Benjamin Franklin crossing the Delaware!"

"It was George Washington," Pope said.

June ignored this. "He's thinking," she went on, "of how wonderfully important everyone must consider him. He thinks he's Joshua, who can stop the sun and moon at his will."

"But you said he's always reaching out," Pope reminded her. "A predatory opportunist—a sort of human octopus."

Pope watched her profile closely. She did not answer.

"If so," Pope persisted, "he must be reaching out for something on this ship."

"He must be," she murmured. Pope saw her wince, as though already she felt the touch of a revolting tentacle.

On the bridge the third officer appeared and touched his cap to Jansenn. "The passenger Lennox is making a last plea, sir. He wants to ride that boat back to the *Mariposa.*"

"Tell him no," Jansenn snapped. "And see to it that he doesn't."

The bos'n's boat was very close now, almost to the E-deck gate of the *Monterey.* Pope looked down from the top deck and saw that Crotchet was still standing, still posing. The man wore a yachting cap at a cocky angle and was dressed elegantly in whites.

"His announced motive for changing

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ships," Pope said to June, "is to consult me about a mineral concession in New Guinea. In which case he'll probably look me up the minute he comes aboard."

June gave a nervous laugh. "I'll be getting out of the way, then. I'll go down to the library and finish a book."

She turned and disappeared through the crowd.

Below, the bos'n's boat pulled up at the E-deck gate and a ladder was tossed down to it. Crotchet climbed nimbly up to the E-deck foyer. His baggage came after him.

The bos'n's boat pushed off. Oarsmen skulled it back toward the *Mariposa*.

In E-deck foyer, the *Monterey's* second officer telephoned to the bridge. "Mr. Crotchet and his baggage are aboard, sir."

Telegraphs jangled. "Half speed on the same course," Jansenn directed.

Below, Crotchet presented himself at the purser's desk. The chief purser knew him, Crotchet having often traveled on the *Monterey*.

"We're fairly full, Mr. Crotchet." The purser offered a deck plan. "Here's a vacancy on D deck, if it suits you."

"It doesn't suit me," Crotchet answered with a touch of arrogance. "Don't want anything below C. Put me on the portside, to catch the trade winds. An exterior, of course. And I must have a cabin with private bath."

The chief purser coughed in apology. "The only thing I have which fits that description, Mr. Crotchet, is number 250."

"Well?"

"But it happens that a steward was murdered in 250 several nights ago. So perhaps you wouldn't care to—"

Crotchet laughed. "Murder, eh? I pay a thousand guineas to ride on a murder ship, do I?"

"Everything's been cleaned up, of course, and the cabin's in perfect order, but perhaps you might not—"

"I make my own decisions," Crotchet cut in. He looked at the chart, saw that 250 was an exterior exactly in midship, a very desirable location. "Since it's all you have on C deck, on the trade-wind side, I'll take it," he said with finality.

"Very well, sir," The purser gave him a key to 250. Then he called for Eddie the bellboy.

"You can put my luggage in there," Crotchet directed. "Right now I want to look up a man named Otis Pope."

"You'll probably find him on deck, Mr. Crotchet."

Eddie took Crotchet's baggage to 250, while Crotchet himself went up in the lift to find Otis Pope.

"THERE'S Mr. Pope, sir." A steward pointed to where Pope sat reclining in his deck chair.

Crochet approached, like a man sure of himself. He planted himself before Pope. "You're Otis Pope," he said heartily. "Well, here I am Ellery Crotchet, of Crotchet South Seas Trading Company, Limited."

Pope arose to face him. They stood confronting each other for a moment, two tall strong men each a power in his own world.

"You got my message, did you?"

"I did." Pope spoke with restraint. His eyes were trying to pierce whatever mask the other man wore. He did not invite Crotchet to sit down.

Crotchet flushed. He was used to having lawyers and engineers greet him with some effusion.

He looked off to where the lights of the *Mariposa* were now receding in the northern distance. The *Monterey* was making full speed south toward Samoa. "It's been quite inconvenient making this shift, Pope," Crotchet said. "But I wanted to see you. So let's get down to business."

"What business?"

"Matter concerning certain mineral concessions in New Guinea that have dropped into my lap."

"Thank you for the attention, but I shan't be able to serve you, Mr. Crotchet."

"What do you mean—won't be able to serve me? Why? You're a consulting engineer, aren't you?"

"I am—and reserve the privilege of selecting my own clients," Pope said.

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The veins on Crotchet's neck began to stand out. He sensed a rebuff, in spite of Pope's mild tone; and Ellery Crotchet wasn't used to rebuffs. "See here, Pope. Possibly you don't know just who I am. I'm—"

"You're Crotchet, a trader," Pope interrupted. "I myself am a mining man with a full schedule of engagements for the next year. I'm sorry, Mr. Crotchet."

Crotchet was brick red by now. He glared at Pope, until Pope's calm brown stare made him look away. Then Crotchet's eyes fell upon a card bearing the name *June Darrow*. The card was in the brass bracket of a deck chair next to the one from which Pope had just arisen.

The name on the card transfixed Crotchet. And Pope, watching him closely, more and more doubted his sincerity. As a mining man he had never heard of any mineral property in New Guinea important enough to send its holder all the way to America for a consultation, or to make him change ships in the middle of the sea.

Crotchet's eyes withdrew from the card and turned to fix with a hostile gleam upon Pope.

"You're turning me down, then?"

"Not a nice way to put it," Pope rejoined pleasantly. "I'd rather put it that my services simply aren't available."

Crotchet turned on his heel and walked away.

JUNE DARROW was reading alone in the library when she heard Crotchet exclaim: "June! What luck! I hadn't the faintest idea you were on this ship."

She looked up and saw Crotchet standing there. His eyes were ardent and he was extending both hands.

June made no move to take either of them.

"You hadn't?" she questioned.

"Of course not. How could I? I thought you were in America." Crotchet, with his face aglow, drew up a chair beside her.

Common sense told her that he must have known very well she was on this ship. During all her stay in America he had written her by every boat, and had cabled her flowers nearly every day. However often she changed hotels, he had managed always to know her address. Even when she had gone to the Gilmans he had known. So, clearly, he must have had an agent keeping track of her.

"You saw me," he asked, "come over from the *Mariposa?*"

"Yes, I saw you come over from the *Mariposa.*"

"It was to see an engineer named Pope. You know him?"

"Yes, I know him."

"And here I run on to you! Best stroke of luck I ever had, June." Then he added in a self-preening tone, "And you know I've had a good many."

"A good many what, Mr. Crotchet?"

"Strokes of luck. Things always come my way, June."

"Nothing's coming your way now," she said coldly.

"*You* are. You must, June. I was expecting to see you in California, of course. Look! I was taking you these." Ellery Crotchet produced from an inner pocket of his silken white coat a flat plush case. He opened it. In it were exposed twenty-four matched black opals. Four rows of them with six in a row, each a smothered mass of fire.

June looked at the stones. It was not easy to say, "I do not want them," but she did. They were like iridescent dew drops gleaming from the blackness of night.

"But they're nothing!" Crotchet pleaded earnestly. "What I really offer you is an empire. Cocoanut islands, plantations, ships, trade stations everywhere. Listen, June, I can make you the most envied woman in the southern hemisphere."

She stood up and looked at him. "You're the big Pacific whirlwind, aren't you! You sweep people off their feet—and damn the cost. I know exactly why you came over from the *Mariposa,* and it wasn't to interview Mr. Pope."

Slowly Crotchet closed the jewel case and restored it to his pocket. Her mention

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of Pope's name brought a sneer to his lips. "Maybe you yourself have been interviewing Mr. Pope!"

"Perhaps I have."

"He's a conceited Yankee!" Crotchet exploded.

"The Yankees have a word for your kind," she retorted.

He stared at her, then asked her curiously, "What?"

"Grandstander," she said. "You knew I was on this ship. You knew it in plenty of time to change boats at Pago. But you preferred to stage a spectacle in mid-ocean, so that a gallery of one little girl could look on. You wanted to impress her with your power. She must observe the vastness of your influence, down here in the South Seas, where you can make the biggest ships stop at your bidding. She couldn't resist you then, you thought—you and your opals. But she can. You've had your boat ride all for nothing, Mr. Crotchet."

June walked quickly from the room, leaving Crotchet frozen with fury.

HE SAT there reflecting bitterly upon June Darrow—and on the circumstance of her deck chair being beside Otis Pope's. After a while he arose, went out, passed through the lounge and on to the bar. There he ordered Scotch. The bartender was refilling his glass when Smullet and Piper, the newsreel men, came up.

Piper said: "We shot your boat ride, Mr. Crotchet. What about posing for a close-up in the morning?"

Having been twice rebuffed, the suggestion went a little way toward assuaging Crotchet's vanity. With a nod of assent, he ordered drinks for Piper and Smullet.

"You're just in time to get in on a big murder mystery," Smullet confided.

"Murder?" echoed Crotchet. "Yes—the purser said something about it. It was a steward got killed, wasn't it?"

"First a steward, then a passenger."

So long as Crotchet was paying for the drinks, Piper and Smullet were more than willing to dispense details of the mystery.

One of these details awakened quick interest in Crotchet. "A girl named Gilman, you say? A cabin mate of Miss Darrow's?"

"That's right," Piper said. "Make it an old-fashioned, this time," he added to the bartender.

Ten minutes later Crotchet knew all that was generally known about the murders on the *Monterey*. "They're waiting for a wire from Melbourne," Smullet whispered. "When it comes, it ought to be the lowdown on a two-timer named Lennox."

Ellery Crotchet held up his glass and looked thoughtfully at it.

"Tell me more," he invited, "about this mining engineer whose post was taken."

Piper, between sips of his old-fashioned, told everything he knew about Otis Pope.

"Gets along pretty well, doesn't he," Crotchet prompted, "with this June Darrow?"

"They're just like that," Smullet said. He held up two fingers. "Been together all the time since Honolulu. Wouldn't surprise anybody if they made a match of it. Funny thing, too; they say this big-shot engineer's been more or less girl-shy all his life."

"He's taken a tumble for this one, if you ask me," Piper put in.

"And what about *her?*" countered Smullet. "She hasn't looked at another man on the boat since Pope came aboard."

CHAPTER XV

SPRAGG ON THE SPOT

OTIS POPE was restless. He paced the nearly deserted starboard side of A deck in the hope that June might join him there. Twice he looked in at the library, but she was not in sight. When six bells struck, he presumed she had gone to her cabin.

An uncertainty nagged him, one which did not concern an expected message from Melbourne about the identity of a bridegroom, but which concerned Ellery Crotchet and June Darrow.

Why was the girl so unnaturally fearful of this man Crotchet?

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At last Pope went into the smoking room and kept on aft through the bar. He saw Crotchet drinking with the two cameramen. Pope continued on into the pavilion. A few couples were dancing, but June was not there.

Then he glimpsed a slim figure in white out on a narrow balcony which overlooked the cabin-class deck. It was June, and she was alone.

Pope moved quickly to her. She looked up with a smile as his elbow touched her own. "I'm glad you came," she said. "I've been depressed and lonely."

"So have I," he said.

For a long while they stood silently side by side, leaning over the aft rail and looking back at the green wake of the ship as it merged into a field of buried stars.

"I said no to Crotchet," Pope said finally.

When she made no response he asked, "Did you?"

"I did," she admitted, "—even when he offered me twenty-four marvelous opals."

"Opals?"

"Black opals—one for each year of my life."

"You're twenty-four, June?"

"Today," she said, "and Crotchet knew it. He timed everything perfectly, you see. He's always so calculating—and dramatic."

Otis Pope looked at her longingly. "I have to reverse those figures," he said without apparent relevance. "I'm forty-two."

"That's young—for a man who's done so much and been so many places."

"I'm tired," Pope said, "of going places alone."

The intensity of his tone made her look up at him, half startled.

"Are *you?*" he asked impusively. She saw his tall whiteness looming beside her in the gloom, his strong face alight with sincerity. What she heard were words Otis Pope had never spoken before.

"We can go on together—to Tasmania, Africa, Peru—everywhere. There's a Navy chaplain at Pago Pago, June."

She was breathless—and only vaguely aware of a clatter as running steps hurried toward them along the sun deck.

"I love you," Pope said.

She stood confused—aware now that the clatter of steps came racing down the companionway back of them. A voice called, "Mr. Pope."

It was Corliss. He reached the balcony and hurried to Pope and the girl. "Captain Jansenn wants you at his quarters right away, Mr. Pope."

The respite seemed welcome to June. "Is there anything new?" she asked.

Pope turned reluctantly toward the first officer.

"The captain's just received that answer from Melbourne," Corliss announced. "It's the deadwood on Lennox. He's Spragg. We've got him on the carpet now, and the old man wants you to sit in on it, Mr. Pope."

"Very well," Pope agreed wearily. To June he said: "I'll be back as soon as I can. Will you wait here?"

"I'll wait," she promised.

She still stood confused and uncertain, as Otis Pope ascended to the upper deck with Corliss.

CAPTAIN JANSENN'S quarters were forward on the top deck, just beyond the gymnasium and under the bridge. A narrow space of boat deck gave access, and through this Corliss ushered Pope.

They found Kimberton Lennox backed against a wall, confronted by Jansenn and Honuapo. Jansenn was aggressively excited. In his hand he held a radiogram from Melbourne.

"You're tagged, Lennox," he charged as Pope entered, "and you might as well talk. Why did you murder two persons on this ship?"

Lennox protested desperately, "I didn't." Pope could see that he was in a panic. His face, framed against the starlit circle of a porthole, was paper white.

"Why did you steal Mr. Pope's mail?" shouted Jansenn. He shook a wedding invitation under Lennox's nose.

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"I didn't," the man repeated shrilly.

"Then how do you explain this?" persisted Jansenn. "Here's a description of Kenneth Spragg." He read aloud from the radiogram: "Black eyes, dark wavy hair, slender, age thirty-four, slight cleft in chin, narrow face, straight nose, teletype photo being sent to Pago.

"We'll be at Pago day after tomorrow," Jansenn went on. "But we won't need the photo because the description fits you perfectly. You're Lennox, on the way to marry in Melbourne as Spragg. Mr. Pope has known you for years. He's invited to the wedding; and the invitation, stolen from his room, was found under the murdered steward's body. Explain that, Lennox. No wonder you wanted to change ships tonight!"

Lennox cried in rising hysteria: "I didn't do it. I wasn't in Mr. Pope's room. I didn't—"

Otis Pope cut in quietly: "I rather think he's right on that count, captain. He'd hardly leave the one letter he wanted, out of the entire batch, under the body of his victim."

"Of course I wouldn't!" Lennox protested hoarsely. He threw a look of relief toward Pope.

"But later you *did* try to kill me, so I wouldn't expose you at the Dow wedding." Pope spoke with gentle persuasion.

Lennox met the steady brown eyes for a moment, then broke down. His chin dropped. "Yes, I did try to kill you," he said in a choked voice. "Then I tried to kill myself."

"Possibly you can clear yourself of a murder charge," Pope suggested, "by making a clean breast of things. Why not begin at the beginning and tell your whole story?"

"All right," Lennox murmured. "I'll tell you."

"You met Harriet Dow, the Melbourne heiress, when she toured America last year?"

"At a resort in the Poconos," Lennox admitted. "It began as an ordinary summer flirtation, and I gave her the first name I thought of, Kenneth Spragg."

Pope nodded. "Then, I suppose, you became considerably attached to each other. She still thought you were Spragg, a single man, when she went back to Australia?"

"That's it. We corresponded. Then I had a quarrel with my wife. My business went to pot. I decided to chuck it all and fade out."

"By going to Melbourne," Jansenn prompted severely, "where you could marry a girl for her fortune!"

"Not that," Lennox protested. "It's Harriet herself I want, and now—" he hid his face on his arm. A convulsive sob escaped him.

"You offered marriage by mail and were accepted," Pope said. "The date was set and you sailed for Melbourne on this ship."

"I was afraid," Lennox confessed, "that Harriet would write me as Spragg, addressing me in care of this ship at Honolulu. But she didn't. The only letter I got on the way was addressed to Kenneth Spragg in care of general delivery, Honolulu. I got it there, and—"

"Wait a minute," Pope interrupted. "Did you see any other *Monterey* passenger in line at the general delivery window?"

Lennox thought a minute. "Yes, I think I did. As I turned to leave the post office, I saw Miss June Darrow in the line. She was third or fourth back from the window."

"Why did you ask at the window for mail addressed to myself, Otis Pope?"

"I didn't."

"Someone did. Miss Darrow heard someone ahead of her speak my name."

"It wasn't I. I asked only for Kenneth Spragg's mail, received one letter and went out."

"Did Miss Dow in her letter mention that I was being invited to the wedding?"

"No. I had no idea you'd be on the ship until I saw you on deck with Miss Darrow. It gave me a shock, simply because—well—because I had a guilty conscience. You knew me and you knew my wife."

"Arriving in Sydney you planned to throw away your passport and go by train,

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as Spragg, to Melbourne? And for that reason had already removed identifying marks from your baggage?"

"That's right."

"You saw me on deck and were shocked. Go on from there."

"I went to the bar and had a few drinks. By then the ship was buzzing with rumors about two murders. And about a theft of Mr. Pope's mail. I knew nothing about these crimes, but soon I began to catch details. I learned that an invitation to my own wedding had been found at one of the crimes. That really did shock me, and I had a few drinks more."

"What time was this?"

"A little before ten o'clock. I went down to my cabin, then. Right away I could tell someone had been in there. Things were disarranged. The cord of my bathrobe was gone. I went into the corridor and asked a steward, 'What's up?' He said, 'Hell to pay; a lady just found strangled with the cord of a yellow bathrobe.' "

"Then what?"

"I went back into my cabin feeling sick. It looked like someone was framing me. Two murders, with a Spragg-Dow invitation left at one and my own bathrobe cord used at the other. Worse—eventually Otis Pope would expose and denounce me at the wedding.

"The first thing I did was chuck my bathrobe out through a porthole. Then I got a .32 pistol from my trunk and put it in my pocket."

"Why," Jansenn demanded, "did you do that?"

"For self protection. A murderer was running loose, and he had a key to my room. Already he had framed me twice. Whoever he was, he had it in for me, so I wasn't going to meet him without a gun."

JANSENN and Pope exchanged glances. Corliss and Honuapo stood back of them, transfixed with attention. So far Lennox's story seemed to be lucid and credible.

"I went up to the smoking room and joined a poker game," Lennox resumed. "Didn't want anyone to see I had the jitters. Those whiskies had gone pretty much to my head, but all through that game I kept thinking. About Otis Pope. And about Harriet. I didn't want to lose her. And yet I was bound to lose her because Otis Pope would be at the wedding."

"What you really didn't want to lose was a girl's fortune!" rasped Jansenn.

"I swear it wasn't that." Lennox looked appealingly at Pope.

"But you admit shooting at Mr. Pope?" insisted Jansenn.

Again the chin of Kim Lennox dropped. He said spiritlessly: "Yes, I was just that desperate not to let anything stand in the way. There was a gun in my pocket. It was put there for self defense, but when I looked out through a porthole and saw Mr. Pope on deck, another idea came to me. Two murders had already been committed. If Otis Pope's made the third, they'd think one criminal accomplished all three. I had alibis for the first two, so I wouldn't be suspected of the third.

"And even for the third I could get an alibi, for I saw a way to leave this poker game without being missed. It was stud—everyone was watching the bets. Getman and Mrs. Royer had been standing back of us for a while, but they had gone."

"I know how you slipped away," Pope inserted. "I tried it out myself this afternoon. In a game where everyone had been drinking and during a particularly interesting hand, the absence of a player might not be noticed."

Lennox swabbed sweat from his forehead. "When I got back to the game, they were just finishing the hand. It had absorbed them. They didn't know I had left. They'd all been drinking. . . ."

"What next?"

"I almost went crazy. I hated myself for failing. Couldn't try it again because I'd had to ditch the gun and they'd found it. Everything was lost now, I thought. I couldn't go back home. And I couldn't go on to marry Harriet in front of a guest who knew me."

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"It was a tough outlook," Pope admitted, "either way."

He could easily imagine the final pitch of the man's distress when, last night, a boy had gone through the ship paging Kenneth Spragg.

"So I decided to kill myself," came wretchedly from Lennox.

"Bad job you didn't!" Jansenn growled.

"You mean that was before you heard Crotchet was coming over from the *Mariposa?*" Pope asked.

"Yes. When I heard that I bucked up. It looked like a chance to escape. Before I heard about it, I tried to get up nerve to jump over the rail. But I couldn't do it. It made me sick to look out—at the bigness of the sea—and to think of drowning out there, all alone. I went down to my cabin to think of another way."

"Did you?" Pope prompted.

Lennox nodded. "The ship doctor's office was just two doors away, and it gave me an idea. I went in there. If anyone saw me I could claim to be sick. I looked sick. But the doctor wasn't there and I had a chance to look around. I found some strychnine—oh! it's too terrible!"

Lennox, nerves shattered, broke into an hysteria of sobbing. Corliss had to support him or he would have fallen.

"Put him on the couch there," Jansenn directed, "and get some ice water. And some brandy. I think there's a good deal more yet he hasn't told."

CHAPTER XVI

EXIT BENEDICT

ON THE aft balcony of A deck, just back of the dance pavilion, June Darrow stood alone by the rail. Otis Pope had asked her to wait for him there, and she was still waiting.

Crotchet, from his position at the bar, could see her there. Piper, Smullet and other customers had given him a complete account of murders on the *Monterey*. One part of Crotchet's mind was grasping at these facts, while another was fastening upon June Darrow.

When June heard a step back of her she thought it was Pope returning. She turned, then, and with dismay saw that it was Crotchet.

Abruptly he inquired, "You've told them about the Gilmans, haven't you?"

She was startled. "No. Of course not."

Crotchet lighted a cigar. Leaning against the rail at her side he blew confident smoke rings.

"When mystery's abroad, anything mysterious should be cleared up," he said. "So I'd better tell them myself."

"You wouldn't!"

"I won't—on one condition," he announced.

"What condition?" She was more than alarmed now.

He said: "That you have nothing more to do with Otis Pope."

She stared at him with loathing as he continued: "Stay completely away from him. He's simply out of your life—on this boat and forevermore."

June backed a step away from him, her face white, her hands clenched. "It's like you," she said. "You're a —"

"An octopus?" he supplied with a jeer. "Always reaching out for things? And I usually get them, too. If I don't, the other fellow doesn't either."

"I could—I could kill you!" she cried.

"Why don't you? Murder seems to be the vogue on this ship. But don't worry. I shan't say a word as long as you have nothing to do with Otis Pope. You imagine you're in love with him, I suppose?"

When she did not answer Crotchet laughed. "All the better. You love him and you lose him. Waiting for him now, are you? Well, I wouldn't, if I were you."

June turned and walked quickly away from him. Crotchet laughed again as he saw her retreat across the pavilion.

In a few minutes Crotchet himself went below to his C-deck cabin. It was his first entry there. He found his baggage on the rack and everything arranged for his comfort. That a steward had been murdered here a few evenings ago bothered him not at all.

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It was past midnight now. The corridors were quiet. Crotchet disrobed and put on pajamas. Then, as he reclined on the bed, he became aware of a discomfort at the center of his back. There seemed to be a hard lump in the mattress.

Crotchet twisted, but the unyielding lump persisted. His first guess was that an earlier occupant had left a liquor bottle between the springs and the pallet of his bed.

To get rid of it, Crotchet arose and turned on the light. To his surprise his delving hand brought forth a revolver—a heavy Colt's forty-five.

Murder abroad and a hidden gun in this bunk! In the very room where the first of two crimes had occurred!

This, then, was the murderer's gun. Crotchet was sure of it. Immediately he sat down with the gun in his hands and did some hard thinking. Why would a killer hide his gun in this room? The answer was that this room, searched thoroughly at the outset, would not without a reason be searched again. And that the killer expected to have need of the gun again.

What, Crotchet wondered, had been the motive for those crimes? Clearly they had something to do with Otis Pope, for they had begun with a theft of Pope's mail.

Ellery Crotchet was an opportunist. Now he held in his hand an advantage over the captain and other investigators—he, Crotchet, had the murderer's gun. The gun, he saw, was loaded.

What use could he make of it? He could turn it in, but Crotchet wasn't in the habit of turning things in without a profit. He was no gunman himself. But someone else on the ship was—someone who probably didn't know that Crotchet, boarding the *Monterey* in mid-ocean, had been given this cabin.

He saw clearly that no personal stigma was involved in possession of the weapon. He, Crotchet, could not possibly be accused of murder on the *Monterey,* for until tonight he had been riding the *Mariposa.*

As he sat mulling it over, Crotchet became aware of light, furtive footsteps in the corridor. Caution made him turn off the light. Then, with a tension, he realized that the steps had stopped exactly in front of his door.

A key was being thrust into the lock. A passkey? Crotchet knew from bar gossip that the unknown murderer had a passkey.

The killer, he divined quickly, was returning here for his hidden gun. Possibly to make use of it. Or perhaps merely to remove it, in case someone boarding at Pago Pago should be given this stateroom. Clearly the man had no idea that the space was now occupied by Crotchet. No one would know that, unless he had taken pains to inquire of purser or bellboy.

Crotchet took two steps quietly in the dark, so that when the door opened he would be back of it. The key turned in the lock. The door began to push open. The beam of a flash preceded as an intruder came stealthily into the cabin.

CROTCHET waited until the man had entered and had closed the door. Then he pressed the revolver against the intruder and said: "Don't move. I'd a little rather not shoot you, you know. But if I must, I must."

From the dark came a startled gasp. Then Crotchet's free hand snapped on the light.

He against whom his gun muzzle pressed appeared to be an elderly hunchback. The man wore dark glasses, carried a cane; his mouth was shriveled as though toothless.

Crotchet demanded, "Who are you?"

The hunchback stood a step away, stared at Crotchet through the dark glasses, then spread his hands in subjection. "You got me," he admitted in a voice of despair. "I'm Benedict. Julian Benedict. And you're Crotchet?"

"That's right."

Benedict gave a sigh. "My mistake. I didn't know you had this room." He sat despondently on the bed.

"I do have it. And I seem to have you, too, Mr. Benedict." Crotchet said it with relish. "You're the man they're looking for

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all right. A man with a passkey who comes sneaking in for a murderer's gun at after midnight!"

Crotchet took possession of the passkey with which the man had entered. He stepped back then, still covering Benedict, who sat hunched forward with his head bowed.

"And what," Benedict murmured, "will you do with me?"

"Turn you in, of course." Crotchet reached for the telephone. "It'll make me the fair-haired boy on this ship—my solving this mystery so quickly after it's stood everyone else on their heads."

"Wait a minute," Benedict pleaded. "I know you've got me, but let's talk this over."

"What is there to talk over?"

Benedict thought desperately. To be turned over to the captain meant a noose for his neck. It would not be so if he were an ordinary passenger. For an ordinary passenger to be caught entering the wrong room, after midnight with a passkey, the situation would be embarrassing but not definitely incriminating. But for Benedict it would be fatal. Because the captain need only scratch beneath the surface to discover he wasn't Benedict at all.

Therefore he must escape from Crotchet at any price. What did he know about Crotchet? Crotchet was an opportunist. He was also a trader. What could he, Benedict, offer in trade to Crotchet? Did he have anything Crotchet could make use of? Yes, he had a secret. It was a very valuable secret. But not so valuable, Benedict considered, as his own life.

At any price he must get free from this room.

"What," Crotchet repeated, "is there to talk about?"

"We might talk about Otis Pope," suggested Benedict. His wits were a seething furnace now. He must bait Crotchet.

And Crotchet was sharply interested. This fellow, he realized, must be an enemy of Otis Pope.

"All right," he invited. "Go ahead and talk about Pope."

"Someone on this boat tried to shoot him," Benedict said.

"So I heard."

"Would it make you mad if he'd succeeded?"

"I wouldn't lose any sleep," Crotchet said.

"You don't like him?"

"I'd just as soon see him staked out on an ant hill," admitted Crotchet. He added curiously, "You were coming in for this gun in order to use it on Pope?"

Benedict toyed with the idea of letting it go at that. Would Crotchet permit him to leave with the gun in spiteful hope that Benedict would proceed forthwith to use it on Pope? Reason said no. Crotchet was an opportunist, a grasper, but not one even passively to connive at murder.

"No," Benedict said after deliberation. "What I've got cooked up for him is a good deal worse than death."

"What's worse than death?" asked Crotchet.

BENEDICT continued to sit leaning far forward, hands and chin resting on the cane. Crotchet noticed a red ring around his wrist, a scar as from the imprint of a tight wrist-watch.

"Disgrace," Benedict answered. "For the biggest mining engineer in the world, nothing could be worse than a complete loss of his professional standing. That's what I'm doing to Pope. When I get through, if you don't interfere, his reputation will be in shreds."

"Just how will you manage that?"

"I've already managed part of it—only he doesn't know yet."

"Let's hear about it."

"You're a trader, Crotchet, and I'll make a trade with you," offered Benedict. "You promise to let me go, and I'll guarantee to ruin Otis Pope."

Crotchet had no thought of accepting. But he was sly. He could agree to accept in order to get facts from his captive.

"All right," he said. "Convince me that you can wreck the professional standing of Otis Pope."

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"It's a large commodity I'm trading. You promise to let me go?"

"If you convince me, yes," Crotchet said.

"It's a trade, then," Benedict said.

He knew nothing less than the truth would convince Crotchet. So Benedict went on rapidly to explain how he had arranged a forgery of Pope's Indo-China reports to Big Business, and how if not hindered he would do the same in Tasmania and South Africa.

"When the facts come out," he concluded, "Pope's reputation won't be worth a thin dime. People will think he was bribed to fake those reports, so that insiders could make stock coups."

The phrase "stock coups" fell pleasantly on the ears of Crotchet. He saw a way to make a tremendous and quick profit for himself.

It would take, he estimated, about sixteen to twenty hours. During that period he would need to let Benedict go free. Nothing would be lost on that score, for the fellow could always be identified by the red ring on his wrist.

His promise to Benedict did not for a moment bind Crotchet. Until a moment ago he had fully intended to turn the man in—but now there was a reason to wait. Benedict could not get off the ship. He could be exposed and arraigned an hour or so before the *Monterey* reached Pago Pago.

"All right," Crotchet said. "I want Pope staked out on an ant hill. You're doing that, so I won't interfere. You can go now."

He opened the door and with his gun waved Benedict from the room.

Benedict slipped hurriedly down the hall. Entering a cabin, his first act was to expunge a circular stain from his right wrist. Then he stripped naked, throwing every item of his attire out a porthole. The cane went with it. He might or might not be able to count on Crotchet's animosity toward Pope as a deterrent for exposing future plans. But at any rate the perpetrator himself was now safe.

IN the captain's quarters, Jansenn, Pope, Corliss and Honuapo were still confronting the luckless Kimbert Lennox.

"Come, man," prodded Jansenn, "you might as well tell the rest of it. You say you got strychnine from the doctor's office?"

Lennox had been difficult to revive. But he sat up now and nodded.

"I meant to take it," he said.

"And didn't?"

"I wish I had," Lennox murmured. "But that evening as I passed through the lounge I thought I saw another way out of it. People were there waiting for Madame Garaud to sing—they were serving coffee. I saw a steward put a cup on the arm of Otis Pope's chair. Then Pope stepped aside to speak with Miss Darrow. Why take that strychnine capsule myself, I thought, when . . .

"Well, anyway I did it. I mean I dropped the stuff in Mr. Pope's cup and went on out."

The others stared. Pope's mind flashed back to the incident of an overturned cup.

"I didn't drink it," he told Jansenn. "An old hunchback named Benedict knocked it over with his cane."

"Benedict?" Lennox looked up vacantly. "I didn't think it was Benedict."

"You mean you saw a man tip over my cup?"

"No, I didn't see him. But he told me about it. He couldn't be that old cripple, because he's young and strong. His hands are like steel." Lennox put a hand to his collar, as though it were choking him.

"What's this?" boomed Jansenn. "How do you know?"

"Because he came into my room late last night and almost throttled the life out of me. He told me to get off at Pago Pago."

"Told you to get off at Pago Pago? What for? Are you crazy?" yelled Jansenn.

"I *was* crazy," Lennox admitted, "by the time that boy got through paging Kenneth Spragg. So I took half a dozen stiff drinks and went to bed. I was sound asleep, in the dark, when someone came in. He had a passkey. He shook me awake,

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and I could feel his hands at my throat. He said he saw me put something in Mr. Pope's cup, and that he tipped it over. He said: 'Leave Pope alone; I want to use him myself.' He said he'd kill me if I didn't get off at Pago." The wretched man finished with a shudder: "I made up my mind to do better than that; I'd get off on the *Mariposa*."

"Lock him up," Jansenn ordered. "By his own admission he tried to murder, even if he didn't."

As Corliss grasped an arm of Lennox, Pope said excitedly to Jansenn: "Let's hurry down and nail Benedict. He's in what cabin?"

Honuapo phoned the purser's office and found that Benedict had cabin 325. With Jansenn he then followed Pope toward the stairs.

Pope was taking them two at a time. "Don't wait for the elevator," he called back.

They caught up with him on D deck. "Why," Jansenn asked breathlessly, "are you sure it's Benedict?"

"Because he tipped over the cup—which fits the story of Lennox. It looks," Pope said, "like I'm the pawn of two conflicting interests, one wanting me alive and the other dead."

They arrived at 325 to find the door wide open. Honuapo stepped in and snapped on the light. The room was empty.

"Go through everything, sergeant," Jansenn directed.

There were two suitcases. Each was labeled J.B. The dresser drawer gave up a ticket stub in favor of Julian Benedict from Los Angeles to Pago Pago. Clothing suitable for a man of average build was arranged in drawers and on the hangers of a locker.

The occupant himself was not in evidence.

"We'll wait here, Sergeant," Jansenn said, "and grab him when he comes in."

Two of them were enough to wait for Benedict, Pope thought. Someone else, he remembered, had promised to wait for himself, Otis Pope. On the aft balcony of A deck.

Again Pope took steps two at a time. But when he arrived at the A deck balcony, June Darrow was not there.

CHAPTER XVII

RED-RINGED WRIST

JUNE DARROW did not appear at breakfast either. Pope was at his table early, fresh and keen in spite of his late hour of retiring. He ordered a large breakfast, then dallied over it, his eyes seeking the entrance expectantly.

Finally the waiter, arriving with an omelette, said to him: "Miss Darrow won't be in this morning, sir. She just telephoned for us to send breakfast to her cabin."

Pope concealed his disappointment. No doubt the excitement of last night, with mysteries boiling about the ship and with Crotchet coming over from the *Mariposa*, had oppressively fatigued June.

Thinking of her made him remember Crotchet—Crotchet and his twenty-four opals. Turning now, Pope saw Crotchet eating breakfast. The man was at the captain's table, although Jansenn himself had not appeared. For a moment the eyes of Ellery Crotchet and Otis Pope met in challenge. Then Crotchet's lips drooped with a faint derision.

Beyond him, Mrs. Royer was seated with Maurice Engle and Boris Getman. This trio was engaged in hushed whispers. Some hint of Kim Lennox's collapse and arrest must have reached them. The small table in a far corner usually occupied by Julian Benedict was empty. Pope presumed that the old hunchback was by now in custody.

In a few minutes he was disillusioned by Corliss. The first officer came striding in with a worried look and stopped at Pope's table.

"The man Benedict must have taken a dive, Mr. Pope. He didn't show up at his cabin. We had a guard posted there all night."

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"Probably hiding on the ship somewhere," Pope said.

"He might even have managed to get over to the *Mariposa,* some way," Corliss worried. "Although I don't see how. He's a cripple, so he could hardly swim from ship to ship as we stood by."

Testimony of Lennox came back to Pope. According to Lennox, the hands of Julian Benedict were young and strong.

"We don't know he's a cripple," Pope said slowly. "He seemed to be, and he walked with a cane. He seemed old and doddering. But—"

"But what, Mr. Pope?"

"Have you radioed the *Mariposa?*"

"Yes, just on the chance. Asked them to look for a stowaway who might have made the shift, while Crotchet was changing to the *Monterey.*"

The V furrow between Pope's eyes deepened. "It's not logical, Corliss. I think he's still on this ship."

"I think he saw the game was up, and took a dive in the briny," the first officer insisted. "Good job if he did. Washes everything up just about right."

Corliss moved on. In a few minutes Pope arose and went toward the exit. Piper and Smullet, seated together, called a good morning as he passed. Then, face to face in the dining room doorway, Pope encountered Asa Ashurst.

The cocoa-bean buyer had a haggard look and his eyes were bloodshot. He gave a pathetic smile and said, "I heard about Lennox, Mr. Pope."

"It means," Pope conceded, "that we owe you an apology, Mr. Ashurst."

"For thinking I took the shot at you? Well, I said I didn't, and I didn't. I'm not that big a fool, Mr. Pope. It's like I told you—I'm just an old man with a son in trouble."

Pope gave close scrutiny to the other's features. The man wasn't old, he thought, probably not much over fifty. Indubitably he was in low spirits.

"You're not looking well this morning," Pope said. "Have a bad night?"

"Of course I did. Who wouldn't? We're getting closer to Suva every minute, aren't we? You can guess what that means to me, can't you?"

Otis Pope nodded in embarrassed sympathy.

"But no hard feelings, whatever happens." Ashurst smiled in self-pity as he said this, adding, "Here's my hand on it, Mr. Pope."

His right hand gripped Pope's. The grasp was firm and strong. By a watch on the extended right wrist Pope saw that it was nine o'clock.

POPE went on up to his suite. As he entered he could hear the clicking of a typewriter in the sitting room. He looked in there and saw Dr. Mingo studiously at work before a portable.

"I make copies of these assays," said Mingo.

"Oh yes, those old assays on Tasmanian Tin? Well, it's a long way to Tasmania yet. Take your time, Dr. Mingo."

Pope closed the door and went to his bedroom phone. He called June's cabin and when she answered he said brightly: "Good morning, June. Missed you at breakfast."

"I didn't feel up to it," she said. "Are you—" She broke off. A new restraint was in her voice and Pope was quick to catch it.

"I'm going out on deck," he said. "Are you coming up?"

There was a long wait. Then: "I don't think I will, this morning. I'm rather—tired."

The day would be blistering hot, Pope thought. It wasn't like her to stay below on such a day—just because she was tired.

"But I must see you, June. You've been thinking about what I said last night—on deck?"

His voice was urgent.

Another wait. Then: "Yes, I've been thinking about it." Her distress was more than ever apparent.

A shadow crossed Pope's face. The reason, he thought, was clear enough. What a fool he had been!

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"Sorry you're not coming up," he said, and put down the phone.

With a shrug, then, he went to a wall mirror and stood looking himself in the eyes. "Pope, you're a clumsy old bounder! You're forty-two years old, and you made a girl of twenty-four miss breakfast just so she wouldn't have to hurt your feelings. What a superannuated ass you are, Otis Pope!"

With a grim compression of his lips he stoked his pipe and sat down to puff it moodily. From the next room he could still hear the click of Mingo's portable.

Then the outer door opened and Captain Jansenn came in with Honuapo. The captain's rugged face showed lines of fatigue, yet at the same time he seemed vastly relieved.

"We're shed of it at last, Mr. Pope—this mystery business. Lennox tried to kill you and we've got him locked up. Benedict did kill two other people and he's taken a jump over the rail."

Pope said apathetically, "Yes, Corliss told me." He was still thinking about June.

"We don't know why Benedict pulled the crime wave on us," Jansenn went on, "but it's clear enough that he did it. You check on that, don't you?"

With an effort Pope returned his wits to the Benedict mystery. He began counting off points. "Yes, because the murderer had a passkey. The man who entered Lennox's room also had a passkey. He told Lennox he tipped over my coffee. I saw Benedict do that, so Benedict must be the man."

"Agreed," Jansenn echoed with a sigh of finality.

"The next question is," Pope said, "who is Benedict?"

Jansenn looked up with a start. "What do you mean?"

"I mean it doesn't necessarily follow that the killer jumped overboard. My own feeling is that he hasn't."

"What?" demanded Jansenn. "Now look here, Mr. Pope, if you're going to start this thing all over again, just when we get it settled—"

"We haven't really got anything settled," Pope said, "except the Lennox angle. We don't know Benedict's motive. We don't know why he took my mail. We don't know why he took the entire available supply of *Star-Bulletins*. We don't know why he wanted Lennox to refrain from shooting me. We don't know he's Benedict."

JANSENN looked at Pope as though he were crazy. Honuapo, too, was gaping.

"Don't know Benedict is Benedict? Explain yourself, Mr. Pope."

"One thing about this criminal has impressed me from the first," Pope said. "He's bold. He takes chances. For instance, it was an outrageously bold act to enter a dark cabin to admonish Lennox. A shrewd criminal doesn't do those things unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless he has a retreat. An out. An open door through which to vanish safely at any moment."

The captain stared hard at Pope. "You're trying to tell me Benedict is two men."

"I don't know," Pope admitted. "But when we look back at him now, we can suspect he wasn't a genuine hunchback. We had no reason to scrutinize him especially until we got the tip from Lennox. Then we reached for him and he wasn't there. He'd slipped into some retreat—faded through some open door which he possibly had ready all the while. It would account for an otherwise insane boldness."

Honuapo nodded quietly.

"Two Benedicts?" repeated Jansenn, still gasping.

"No. One man with two tickets, two cabins, two sets of baggage. A will-o'-the-wisp who could become another person, his real self, at will."

The captain fretted, and a choleric red mounted to the roots of his hair. "If that's it, he won't get away with it. You suggest this fellow changed the lower part of his face by taking out dental plates? And the upper part with dark glasses?"

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"If we're on the right track, he used those and other tricks," Pope said.

"We can't go around accusing everyone with false teeth," Jansenn grumbled.

Pope made a gesture of assent. "Among the thousand adults on this ship, passengers and crew, there's probably fifty or more who use false plates."

Honuapo broke in: "Please, I think better indentification is red ring I see about this man's right wrist."

"I noticed that myself," Pope said. "Might have been made by a wrist watch strap worn too snugly there."

"More likely by a handcuff," Jansenn growled. He turned to Honuapo. "Run that down, sergeant. Tell Corliss to patrol the ship for a man with a faint reddish mark around his right wrist. If they find a man like that, bring him here."

Honuapo started to go out but Pope called him back. "And while you're patrolling the ship," he suggested, "ask if anyone ever saw Benedict enter any other cabin than his own. I mean any other cabin than number 325."

Jansenn agreed. Honuapo saluted and went out.

"Any other angles, Mr. Pope?" questioned Jansenn.

"There's the frame angle," Pope said after deep concentration. "Apparently the man we're looking for tried to implicate Lennox. Why did he choose Lennox?"

"By using a cord from his bathrobe?"

"And by dropping an invitation to the Dow-Spragg wedding."

"But that's easy," Jansenn offered. "Benedict wanted to keep you alive. Lennox wanted to kill you. So by framing Lennox he figured we'd put Lennox in custody. Then Lennox couldn't take any more shots at you."

"The murders happened before Lennox took even one shot at me," Pope objected. "How did Benedict know at the outset that Lennox would later try to shoot me?"

"Chances are we won't know," Jansenn muttered, "till we catch him."

He frowned.

"Wait. Here's an idea. Possibly Benedict wasn't trying to frame Lennox when he left the invitation at the Wilkins crime."

"Then why would he leave it there?"

Pope said: "He may have left it there because obviously it was a piece of strictly social correspondence. A big, square, formal envelope of high quality, addressed to me in a woman's hand. Benedict's own motive no doubt deals with business matters. Something to do with my work as a mining engineer. He had a handful of business letters and telegrams. With them he had one which was patently not business, but social. So he dropped it. It would make a nice red herring, directing attention toward some lady friend of mine and therefore diverting attention from the real business."

"Good so far," Jansenn said. "But what about the bathrobe cord?"

"The wedding invitation developed the name 'Spragg.' News of this clew got abroad through the ship and reached the murderer. An opportunist, he made capital of it. Having accidentally framed Spragg once, he followed through by doing it on purpose at the second murder."

"But how did he know Spragg was Lennox?"

"He didn't know. But he knew Spragg had some connection with Lennox because he'd heard Lennox call for mail addressed to Spragg at Honolulu general delivery. Lennox didn't see the murderer in that queue before the window. But the murderer probably was there because Miss Darrow, near the end of the queue, heard a voice at the window ask for mail addressed to myself, Otis Pope."

JANSENN ran a despairing hand through his hair. "It's a jumble," he complained. "I can't make head nor tail of it."

For a space neither said anything more. In the extreme quiet Pope became aware that the clicking of Mingo's typewriter, in the next room, had stopped. Was Mingo taking all this in? Pope's mind reverted to

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June's instinctive distrust of the secretary. And to the furtive retreat of someone from a telephone.

On an impulse Pope stepped to the door of his sitting room, opened it and looked in. Dr. Mingo was no longer there.

"That brings us up to the shot fired on deck," Jansenn said. "Lennox played hooky from the game long enough to do it. So if Benedict is two men, my hunch is this: one of the other players in the game was Benedict in his true character. He saw Lennox return to the game, guiltily. So from then on he knew Lennox had to be watched."

Pope smiled. "What makes you think that?"

"Because from then on Benedict did watch Lennox. Watched him so alertly that he was able to save you from drinking strychnine in your coffee."

"It overlooks one point," Pope said. "The other six men were Ashurst, Engle, Ladislaw, Rossmore, Piper and Smullet. Later I sat in with the same group, except for Smullet. I saw them deal cards. A dealer deals with his sleeves well back from his wrists—and I didn't see any wrist with a red ring."

"We'll look for a red ring on Smullet," Jansenn promised, "and on everyone else."

He went out. Otis Pope followed him to the deck.

They circled the deck, particularly observing the right wrists of male passengers.

Maurice Engle was dozing in his deck chair. Pope could see no mark on either of his wrists. Farther on Asa Ashurst came up with a puzzled look and said: "They're asking if anyone's seen a man with a marked wrist. Is that right?"

"That is correct," Jansenn answered gravely.

Ashurst removed his watch and exposed the bare wrist. "Want you to know I'm not hiding anything," he said.

He waited patiently while Pope and the captain examined his wrist.

Pope, after a glance at the bare wrist, passed on. At the bar he found Smullet and Boris Getman. "Here's how!" Smullet said, raising a glass in his right hand.

Getman likewise raised a glass and Pope saw that both men's wrists were unmarked.

It was the same everywhere. The inquiry was well advertised by this time, and here and there Pope encountered passengers who insisted on exposing wrists.

"I'm in the clear," Ladislaw grinned. "Look!"

Corliss appeared beside them. "It's no good, Mr. Pope," he reported. "We've had half the crew and all the stewards checking. No one has a red-ringed wrist. But lots of people remember that Benedict had one. And so—"

"And so what?" challenged Pope.

"And so Benedict must have taken a dive, after all."

"Here's another precinct to be heard from," Pope said with a doubtful smile. Miss Mundy, the tall, thin brunette with a flat, dissipated face, was bearing toward them.

"Tell me," she said breathlessly, "is it true they want to know if Mr. Benedict was ever seen going in some other cabin than 325?"

"That's what we want to know, miss," Corliss said.

"Well, I didn't see him go into one," Miss Mundy testified, "but I saw him come out."

Her eyes were popping.

"Saw him come out of what cabin?"

"It was the most forward cabin on the corridor where the beauty parlor is. Right across from it, you know. I was in there getting a finger wave, and—"

"If it was right across from the beauty parlor, it was number 300," Corliss said quickly. "When was this?"

"Oh, two or three days ago. Right after breakfast."

Honuapo brought out his list of exterior, end-of-a-row, portside cabins. Number 300 was on the list, and its occupants were Mr. and Mrs. George Rossmore.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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Nothing to Laugh About

By EDWIN H. HOOVER

THIS burly Western job with red hair and a strange habit of smiling when, so far as I am able to see, there was nothing to cause amusement, could do me a large favor if I knew where to find him.

The fact that he bears a flaming torch, such as I carried before my troubles faded it to a mottled pink, does not give me a claim on him. But I never cease to wish that he will come forward and tell what happened in that Loop hotel after Slim Pascoe had delivered a very depressing funeral oration for my benefit. The mouthpiece I hire to explain what I should have done to keep myself out of trouble tells me that—But never mind.

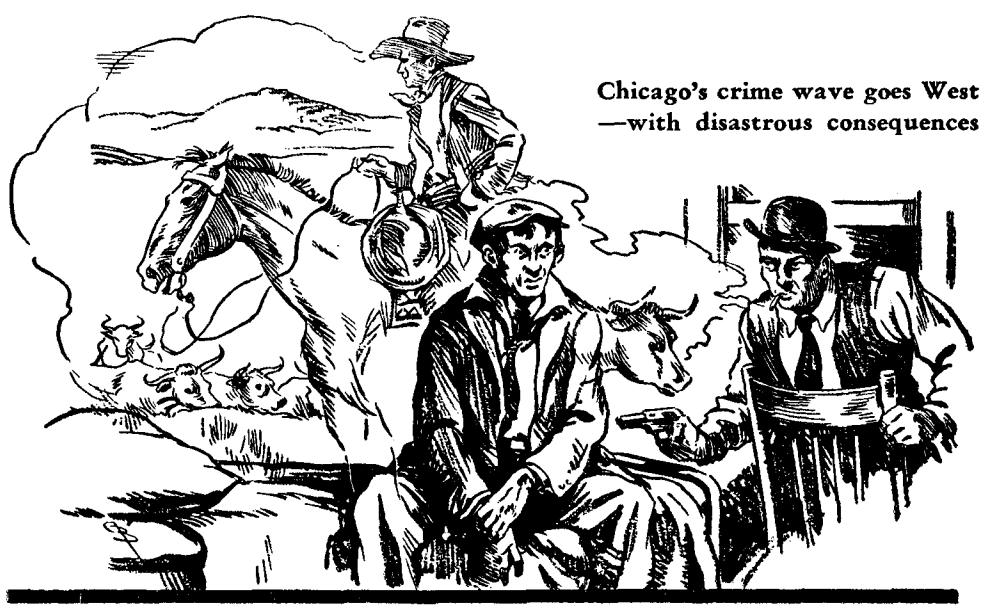
If you have never been invited to your own funeral, you will not know the feeling, which is to walk slow, out of respect for the near departed, and wish for a break. I did, but nothing came of it until this oversize gent with the crimson skullthatch chiseled in. His arrival was most welcome, on account he moved me off a very hot spot indeed. Now that I have had a chance to cool, I regret that he did not leave his name and address in the confusion of a hasty departure.

Without going too much into details, the events leading up to my meeting with this person from the wild, open spaces happened in some such manner as this:

I was about my business in the Loop district, with a load of malarky from Protective Association clients when someone in the crowd hailed me from a point southeast of my left shoulder:

"Hi, Mug!"

What I jokingly call my brain did a back spin. Such a feat is difficult in the confusion of Randolph street at the noon hour on a Saturday. Elevated and surface cars are a din in the ears. The jostling of citizens, some of them peeling oranges and bananas, or cracking peanuts, is a pain in the neck. Nevertheless, my brain came out of its acrobatic feat with a name to



Chicago's crime wave goes West —with disastrous consequences

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go with the voice which I had not heard for a year. *Slim Pascoe!*

The last time I had seen him was one night in the railroad yards when he was dodging a sub-machine spray sent with my personal compliments.

Slim always prided himself on being the world's hardest human—unless you except the petrified man in a circus. His presence at that particular moment made me feel softer than a tomato which has ripened too long on a vendor's cart.

"Hi, Slim!" I greeted him cordially, without turning my head, in the manner of one old friend to another. To say that I was not nervous would be like denying you have a fever when a thermometer in your mouth registers 105 degrees above zero.

He was slightly behind me and I could not see him. But I could feel his presence. A hard object, which I was convinced would turn out to be a roscoe in his coat pocket, pressed against my ribs.

Although I am much inclined to be ticklish, I did not feel an impulse to laugh when he nudged my flank with this hard object; nor when he said: "Let's go!" in a tone of voice which was by no means playful.

Slim prodded me through the noonday mob toward Lake Michigan. He pointed me to the right when we came to an alley between State and Dearborn. Here we found less foot traffic, but great turmoil among truck drivers; and it looked like a break to dodge behind something that would stop bullets. However, Slim pushed lovingly against my left side so that my right shoulder always grazed the brick walls of buildings. There were doorways—most of them closed—but it did not seem good judgment to duck into one of them because a slug of lead will travel much faster than I am able to run.

Where he was taking me I did not know. Still, I knew where to turn when the pressure against a floating rib grew painful. We went through the rear entrance to Patsy Dugan's rooming house and up three flights of stairs which were brightened by small electric-light globes at each landing. On the fourth floor, about halfway down a corridor, Slim said: "Stop!"

Being in no position to argue the matter I obeyed. Slim reached past me and turned the knob on an unlocked door. He did not, for so much as a split second, take the finger off me. He merely shifted his rod from my flank to a spot halfway between my belt and my back collar button when he opened and closed the door.

SLIM was much astonished when he did not find a rod in any of the usual places while patting me for concealed weapons. I explained this by telling him that I am now an upright citizen and have no need for smoke wagons. To hide his disappointment he took a roll of batwings—the day's collections—off my hip.

"Sit on the bed," Pascoe purred, like a cat with prospects of fish for supper. "I have come a long way to tell you something, Ace."

I am called "Ace" on account of the hole card I am apt to flash at odd times.

He sat across the room from me in his shirt sleeves. His vest was unbuttoned, and he toyed with a gat that followed me whenever I moved a muscle.

I gave him the double gander. Slim Pascoe used to be pale as skimmed milk and thin as a two-timer's alibi. Now he was brown, like some of the Big Shots after a season in Florida. There was flesh on his bones. But the cold, blue light in his glimmers would still freeze live steam at fifty yards, and he had the same sour grin such as would clabber dairy products on sight.

"You might as well take off your coat," he urged. "The heat is on."

"No, thanks," I told him. "I got a chill." Which was no lie, in spite of the season being October. Besides, I had something up my sleeve.

"Ace," he began, with those North Pole glimmers drilling into me like a pair of sharp icicles, "you sent me out of Chi on the lam—a rod man riding the rods. That's a laugh. I promised myself I'd

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come back and give you the works, no matter how many of your mob I had to blast—"

"They're all gone," I told him. "I'm the only Moldavi mobster left." A very generous impulse stirred in me. "Look, I am the Protective Association Syndicate which is a racket to insure merchants against pineapples exploding in their stores or homes. I will let you muscle in and become my partner in this benevolent project."

"—and I've never had a chance to forget that promise," he went on as though he had not heard me, which was discouraging in view of my generosity. "I bailed myself out of a box car down in New Mexico, a week or more after leaving you in Chicago, and started hoofing it across country. Wide open spaces—bah!" he snarled, showing a set of teeth such as a large, angry wolf would choose for business purposes. "I walked thirty miles up a dry canyon where the sun was so hot it would melt asbestos hinges off the gates of hell, itself. No water. No shade. I thought of you every step of the way, Ace."

He grinned at me in so brutal a manner that I felt sore all over—as if someone had worked on me with a club. I knew what he meant: My mob and me had run him into the open where he became a mark for the John Laws who wanted him for murder. Being chased from cover, he had to hole up so far away that even the readers, which the bulls send out with pictures of their favorite characters, could not find him.

"Do you know the kind of jaspers that live out there?" he inquired. "You do not, so I will tell you: Dull, dumb yokels that ride steeds and shoot single-action *revolvers*, if you can remember that far back. One of these mugs picked me off the road after I had fell down to die. He was driving a half-ton pick-up, loaded with groceries which he called *chuck*. With me alongside of him in the cab, he kicked and prodded this steaming tea-kettle through dust and sand and heat. I was slug-nutty from the punishment when we stopped at a small house on top of a mountain which is flat as the slab in a coroner's place of business. Near the house, which is built of rough, native bricks called 'dobe, is a corral— You would understand about the corral, Ace, if I explained it as a sort of jail for cows and their families. The bars are parallel to the ground, instead of up-and-down, and, instead of being metal, these bars are trees with the skin peeled off. There is no roof to the cow clink but the inmates do not escape, for reasons I do not understand. Some distance from the corral is a tank, where the female bulls, their husbands and children drink—though nothing but water."

He stopped talking and reached a cigarette from his shirt pocket, and put it in his mouth. From the same pocket he got a match and snicked it on a thumbnail. All this he did with his left hand, not taking his eyes off me or moving the roscoe in his lap by so much as a gnat's eyelash. It had been his trick in the old days to make a ceremony of smoking: First, he would reach a flat, gold cigarette-case from his hip pocket; snap it open; select a cigarette, as if there was some difference between them; snap the case shut; drag out a gold do-hickey that lighted when he pressed a button, and inhale two or three times before putting away the lighter. If he could not smoke with gestures he did not smoke.

So it was evident that the sort of life he had led in a foreign country must have left a deep imprint on his character. Another thing I noticed was that he had fallen into careless habits. Never before had I seen him sit in front of a window, even when the curtain was down and the room dark. But I do not doubt that his sad experience may have affected his head to such an extent that he failed to notice the sun was directly over the court and shining through the glass pane. I have known Slim when he would regard sunlight with the same favor as a Micky Finn in his own highball.

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He continued his tale where he left off:

"This mark, who snatched me from drowning in the sun, greased me with tallow—which is the fat from animals—on the places where I had been fried.

"After a while, he put me out on a lonesome spot which he told me was a line camp. There was nothing for scenery but grass, sagebrush, rocks, a galvanized iron shack and a tank to which beefsteak on the hoof came when they were thirsty. I near went nuts. All I had to do was sit, think and ride a steed—Ever ride a steed, Ace? It is a shakedown. My duty was to see that the portable porterhouses did not venture off the mesa into canyons roundabout; and to keep an eye peeled for strangers whose good intentions I had reason to doubt. For this I got forty dollars a month, food and flop. That's where I have been until ten days ago, Ace.

"One day I was jouncing along the edge of a canyon and met a party whose pan was hid behind a large crop of alfalfa. From him I learned about a racket that has all the profits of city business and none of the risks. The beaver-faced egg explained that if I will encourage prime ribs of beef to loiter near the canyon's rim, he will do the rest. For this small chore I will get a share of heavy scratch when the meat is sold.

"The system is simple: You change the label on an animal to make it appear that he belongs to someone other than the original owner. This can not be done by pasting on phony revenue stamps, because the trademark is *burned* into the hairy outer covering of beefsteak while it is still alive; as a consequence, there must be some more burning to change the design so that it will appear to be the trademark of another person—one who has a right to sell the meat under copyright laws.

"When I made the discovery that overhead is absent—with no investment for protection, materials, transportation, I drove a smart deal to muscle in."

Slim went into a sort of trance, remembering, but came out of it when I wiggled an ear to disturb a fly.

"How long this sort of thing has been going on I do not know," he confessed, "but it was a perfect set-up for me. It gave me a chance to bite the yokel who put me on that God-forsaken spot. You'll understand, Ace, why I hate him: He had red hair, just like you, which kept reminding me of this and that. Also, I hate him on account of his doll who gave me the ritz when I made passes at her."

He tapered off again to pinch out his cigarette, and sat there looking at something which seemed to be directly above my head. I moved a foot to find out whether he still had an eye on me. He had. His trigger finger tightened slightly, then eased. So did I.

"This frill," he informed me, twisting up one corner of his mouth, "has what it takes to put high blood pressure in a cooling system—black hair, brown eyes, and curves that any man will follow even if he is cross-eyed and in a hurry. She is goofy about the redhead, but he won't marry her until he has paid off his debts at the bank; something he can not do unless he sells the beefsteak on the hoof which I have already fed to the cow-boomer and his mob—I ask you, is the percentage in my favor?"

Slim grinned and licked his lips. He was pleased with himself for having crossed up the redhead who was so great a sap as to make him a trusty. This did not surprise me. Slim would turn dentist on a crippled applewoman if he saw a profit in her china clippers.

I gandered over his left shoulder at the court, outside. "You would not believe me if I said the percentage, right now, is against you?"

"No," said he. "I wouldn't. Listen. There is one more thing I wish to say. Then you get the works. When I met this bush-faced cow-booster and his pals for the payoff, I collected it all. I told you they were slow, dumb yokels, didn't I? Well, I put the heat on them with my little old sewing machine"—he fondled the equalizer in his lap—"at a hideout called *Perdido Canyon*. It will be a month be-

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fore the bodies are found. Maybe the hick sheriff will figure I did it; but he will be stopped there. He don't know where I came from or where I went. And *you* won't tell, Ace—"

The rod in his mitt rose a trifle. Almost, I could feel a stream of boiling lead between my eyes, but it turned out to be only cold sweat that trickled down my nose.

"Look, Slim!" I was desperate, wishing for the break that did not come. "Likely you would not believe me if I said that a redheaded job has just pushed his head and shoulders above the fire escape landing at your back?"

"You're telling me?" Slim's tone was quite sarcastic. "That stall was old before beaver went out of style on Mich Boul."

"You still wouldn't believe me," I screeched, losing my dignity, "if I said this jasper has a kind of sandy complexion, curly hair that sticks out under a black, wide-angle skypiece—and that he's drawing a bead on you with a single-action gat in his left hand?"

SLIM PASCOE knew that I was telling the truth when I mentioned a southpaw trigger-man. He had described this redhead in general terms, but nothing was said about him being a portsider; so Slim realized that I was not drawing on my imagination. Besides, the man outside the window straightened up and cast a shadow, as though to prove there was no hooey in my speech.

Quicker than I can tell it, Slim tipped his chair sideways and slid to the floor, next to the wall, where he would be out of range from the window. As he fell, he started blasting at me. What sounded like a flock of angry hornets zoomed past my ears. But I was on my feet and let him have it—six slugs, under the silencer, that sewed a seam down his left side and up the right.

I said I had something up my sleeve. It was a life-saver that dropped snug into my right lunch hook when I pressed a metal spring at my elbow against my side—something I could not do while sitting down. Slim had overlooked this useful gadget which holds a flat shorty against the forearm by means of thin, steel bands until released by the trigger mechanism. Simple as shooting a cuff and a great deal more refined.

A kind of hissing noise, such as you will hear from a leaky gas pipe, was the only sound out of Slim. He was—as the mouthpieces say in court—null and void. I took a gander at the window where this torch-topped yokel stood on the fire-escape landing. He was making motions with his cannon which indicated that he wished to come inside, or else.

I dropped my roscoe to show peaceable intent, and unlocked the window, letting him in. I was afraid that he might break some glass and cause a disturbance that would bring in the neighbors.

"Ditch the rod," said I, in my best social manner.

He gave me the up-and-down and shoved the gun inside his belt.

"I reckon we will get along," he drawled solemn, "though I wasn't so sure when you and Mr. Pascoe met so chummy on the street a while back. It looked like you walked off together after meeting by appointment." He picked up my roscoe from the floor, examining it with great interest, but leaving Slim's where it lay.

I was busy frisking Slim. In a pants pocket was a leather full of sugar from the meat payoff. It was lousy with C notes, double sawbucks and other kinds of green and yellow froghides—ten grand at least. I pouched it, along with the one Slim had boosted off me. All this time the redhead was talking:

"It's likely he did not tell you about Myrtle. She told me how he acted toward her, one day at the ranch. If I had known, right away, that he was getting fresh, I would have paid him off and knocked his ears down. As it was, I went out to Slim's camp and found that he was gone. So I cut sign and trailed him to a cabin in Perdido Canyon—a rustlers' hideout. There I

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found four corpses with automatic bullets in them. I knew, then, that he had 'reverted to type', as the crime experts say—

"Shucks, I knowed who he was. The sheriff of our county has his picture on a police poster; but I never said a word, believing Slim had reformed and would make a good citizen after what I'd done—saving his life and giving him a hideaway at Brushwood Tank—I tracked him to Santa Fe where I found he'd bought a railroad ticket to Chicago. I took an airplane and got there this morning.

"I would have had a hard time finding Slim," he said, "if a cop had not told me Slim would be sure to look up Ace Moldavi who is said to be in circulation around the Loop district. You wouldn't be this Ace Moldavi, would you?"

"I would," I told him in great haste. "But the name will be only a number unless I keep a very pressing engagement at a distant point."

I showed him the way out, which was *not* the stairway where Slim and me came in. Patsy Dugan's hotel specializes in personal service for guests who playfully wish a game of hide-and-seek at odd times. Being a friend of the management, I knew my way about.

IN a very few minutes, the redhead and me found ourselves on Clark street, which is more than a block from the hotel entrance. Citizens were hastening to and fro, paying no attention to us, other than raising their eyebrows and grinning at the redhead's high-heeled boots, which meant that they had spotted him as a stockyards cowboy.

We crossed Monroe Street, escaping a taxicab by the seat of our pants, and I, being anxious to miss a sudden appointment with the John Laws, drew up in front of a tall building, pretending that I had business to transact there.

"Will I be seeing you again?" I inquired, hinting coyly that a pleasant visit had come to an end.

"It is not probable," he sighed. "Well"—he held out his right hand, which is half as big as a cold-storage ham—"I guess we have come to the fork in the road."

Now, I am superstitious about mitt-wringing. It is a silly custom that has brought bad luck to prominent persons who did not look their best in undertaking parlors. Still, I suppose that sort of thing is done among gents in the wild, open spaces where this redhead came from; and I am not one to display ignorance of foreign social habits.

So I slipped him my set of fives, and he clamped down firm, strong and friendly.

"Goodbye." The overgrown, crimson-topped mug, in his ignorant way, held onto me like I was a rich uncle in bad health. "And, by the way," he remarked as though thinking of something unimportant that had slipped his mind. "I reckon Slim did not mention that he took a lot of money from the four cow-thieves he downed. It is cash from the beef they stole off me and other cattlemen in the mesa country. Likely you did not notice—being excited that you put it in your right-hand coat pocket."

He was smiling, though nobody had cracked any jokes and nothing funny had happened, so far as I know. And he was so dumb that he did not notice that I tried to pull loose from him. He just kept on grinning while he reached into my poke and lifted the leather which I had taken from Slim for safekeeping purposes.

Doubtless it is a Western way to boost a friend if he owns something you crave; though why he did not take the Protective Association malarky also, while boosting me for the beef batwings, is something I can not figure out.

Being in a heavy sweat lest flatfeet and harness bulls come bouncing around the corner asking questions I was not inclined to answer, I wrinkled up the old hard pan into creases to show that I was in a jovial mood.

"I am absent-minded that way," I explained, as any honest man will do under the circumstances. My back was to a brick wall, and he was giving me the pump-handle action such as I have seen small-

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town yokels hand to one another in motion pictures.

The redhead ungripped me, still wearing that peculiar grin, as though he was enjoying something or other.

"Come out and see me sometime," was his parting remark.

That is, doubtless, a Western way to invite a guest to your home and fireside; but I have done nothing about it yet. If Slim Pascoe could not stand the heat out there, I am practically certain the climate would do me no good whatever. Besides, I am not traveling great distances now, on account of a matter that happened a few minutes after the redhead left me.

WHILE I was hastening to the secret hideyhole where I am not annoyed by persons wishing to pry into my private affairs, a bevy of John Laws, all of them in harness, pounced on me.

"What is this?" I demanded, with indignation such as any citizen will feel when accused of deeds which he does not believe can be proved on him.

The big lard wearing a sergeant's badge, who was in charge of this roughhouse squad, told me:

"It is a pinch, in case you do not guess the answer in three tries."

"I am clean," I protested, feeling that I have avoided all appearance of evil by parking the gadget from my forearm in a storm sewer. There being nothing for this gadget to hold, after the redhead pouched my sleeve rod, I saw no reason to carry it any longer.

"That may be true," the sergeant agreed, having found my Protective Association collections in a hip poke of my pants. "I will look further and give you a report. You are also hot," he informed me, as though he had just thought of it.

Two of those Johns were holding me by the arms while the big lard cleaned me of kale. A fourth fanned me for hardware.

What was my chagrin when this gendarme who was fanning me turned up the rod which had been used to soften Slim Pascoe. He found it in my right-hand coat pocket—the same one from which the redhead had lifted the leather full of meat malarky!

Now, I had not stashed that roscoe on my person. The last I had seen of it was when the redhead picked it off the floor in Slim Pascoe's room. So what happened took place in some such manner as this:

When the redhead placed his flipper in my coat pocket to boost the beef batwings, he must have planted that lady gun, which weighs no more than a fan-dancer's costume, believing I would enjoy a pleasant surprise, at some future date, to find so valuable an article which was supposed to be lost or stolen. It could not have occurred otherwise. Besides, this explanation is reasonable: I hear that a Western animal, named the Trade Rat, always leaves something to pay for whatever it carries away; and I have no doubt that the natives do likewise. This is an honest custom and I find no fault with it. However, it should be practiced only on those who understand the habit. Complications may arise from an unsuspecting person being in possession of property which is very hot. It happened to me.

No matter how loud I beefed that I will dumfound them with my innocence, those strong-arm bulls rushed me to the rowdy-gow while they added up the score.

This score showed nothing but base hits for the coppers: Eight empty shells ejected from a special .25 automatic, found around and about the corpse of Slim Pascoe, were a perfect fit for the special .25 automatic roscoe which had been turned up on my person. Moreover, those eight shells accounted for the number missing from the clip, which contained two unexploded cartridges; and they tallied with a census of punctures in Slim's hide.

I HAVE explained to the precinct captain, and all other crimechasers who listen, that the party whose fingerprints appear with mine on that peewee roscoe is an important citizen in New Mexico who will prove self-defense for me; but the only reply I get for dishing this useful

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information is a vulgar sound such as low characters utter when they do not believe, or heartily disapprove, something. So if this redhead does not show up to prove that I speak the truth, my mouthpiece tells me, I must retire from business for so long a time that all my Protective Association Syndicate customers will forget me.

While it is true that I am in a jam because of a quaint Western custom which requires that an object shall be deposited to take the place of some article you have lifted, I do not hold a grudge against the burly redhead. What burns me is that the Big Lard and his roughhouse squad did not know Slim Pascoe had been cooked until after they had checked me in at the klink. Those flatties picked me up on complaint of a certain fish merchant who wished to dog the premiums he was paying to my Protective Association Syndicate —such a squawk as can be squared with a fix and a few potatoes placed in the right places.

There should be a law to protect a citizen against being held for murder when he is arrested for committing only a slight misdemeanor.

LOOKING AHEAD!

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COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 4th

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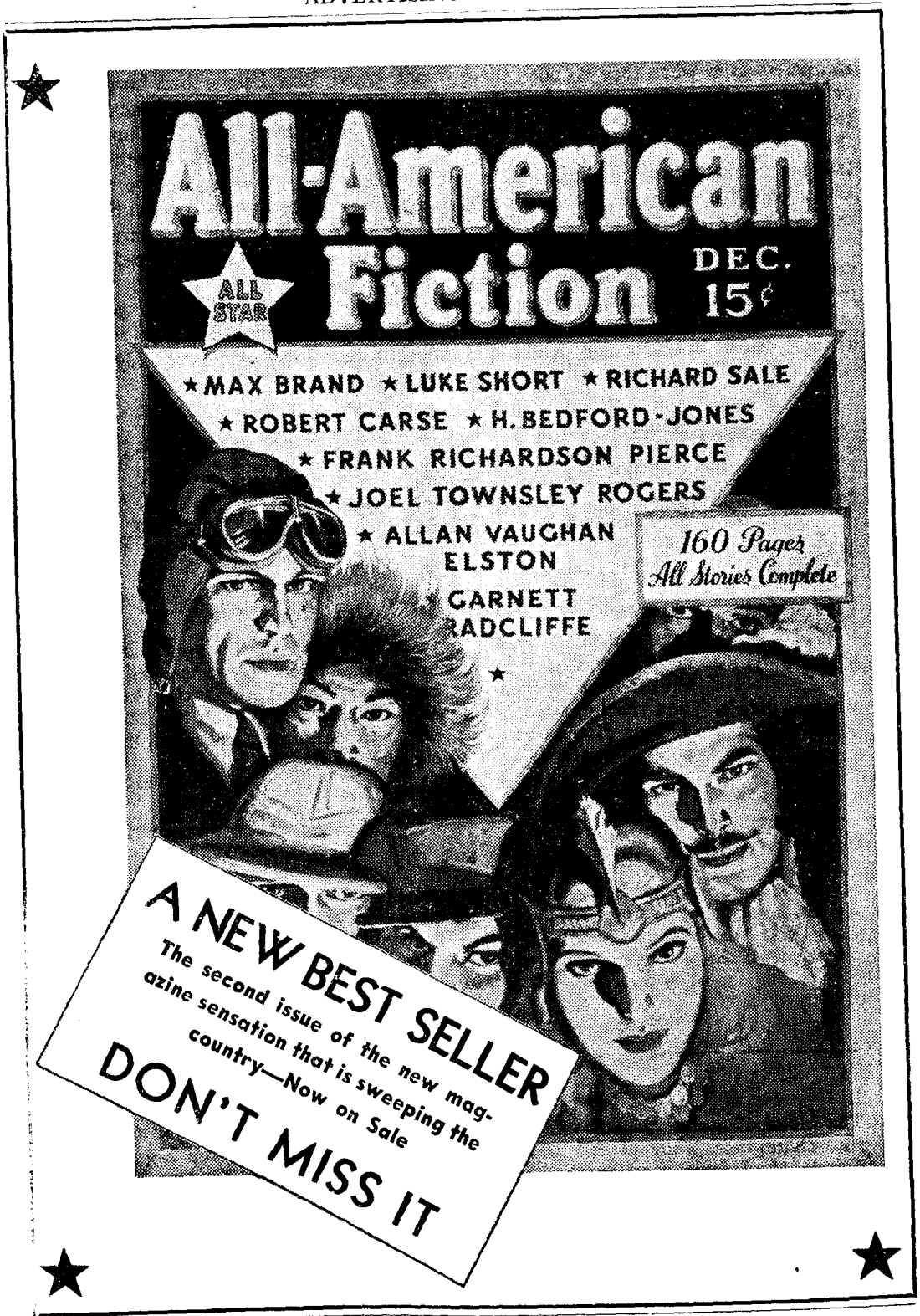
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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

EITHER there's a touch of the pixie in our postman—and that wouldn't be surprising considering the rest of the things that go on around this office—or someone should speak to Mr. Farley. Because our mail—well, really, it *is* pretty odd.

Anyway the first thing that popped up at us when we cut loose with the letter-opener a moment ago was a communication from a gentleman, whom for non-advertising purposes we shall call the Rajah Mefoofsky, offering us for a nominal sum a whole raft of tempting *hors d'oeuvres* like Hindu rose incense, Life Cycles, a perfectly dandy Dream Book—with Peectures—and a complete range of crystal-gazing globes (with free lesson). The three-inch size globe, our correspondent continued in a tone of utter frankness, was the most popular. It retails at only $3.50. The vista was a little staggering. To see the future—that is if the free lesson has any effect at all—for only three dollars and fifty cents seems like an awfully good buy. We've ordered a dozen. We plan to give them for Christmas to all the aunts who usually give us neckties and bookends. This is known as turning the other peek.

The Rajah Mefoofsky also intrigued us with a little something he calls *??? P-r-o-b-l-e-m C-l-i-n-i-c ???* (just like that) and a splendid offer of Astrological Comparisons in Dual Readings—you and your wife or husband, you and your sweetheart, you and your partner, and, in a final outburst of generosity or broadmindedness or frenzy, you and ANYONE else at all. Since we couldn't think of anyone else we'd like to have an Astrological Comparison with, we just gave up the whole idea. Reluctantly.

It took us quite a while to recover from the dazzling vistas of the Far East that the Rajah's little *billet* conjured up. Houris danced before us all morning long—and if you think *that* didn't brighten up the usual Monday pre-noon doldrums—sloe-eyed sirens whispered to us of mystic, silver-tinted dreams that never could be real, and little brown-skinned boys kept climbing up and down invisible ropes all through lunch.

The whole episode gave us a sort of pleasant, early-Christmas-morning feeling. Heaven only knows what will turn up in tomorrow's morning mail. Probably the blueprints for the palace of Kublai Khan all ready to be set up on Oak Boulevard, F.O.B. Xanadu, $215.43.

We were brought rather sharply back to more mundane considerations by the letter below. We haven't looked it up so we aren't quite sure just which of the recently published letters Mr. Lynwood has reference to. But we think we can guess.

A. LYNWOOD

I wish to voice a protest against introducing scurrilous remarks about our chief executive in the Argonotes, and would suggest when letters of this character appear in the Editor's mail, that he consign them to the trash-can where they rightfully belong. Reading between the lines I infer the writer of this offensive communication is afflicted with Hitleristic propensities, and his idea of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, is membership in some Fascist murder-league whose members are obsessed with a fierce determination to rain death and destruction on innocent women and children.

Sacramento, Calif.

WELL it sounds like a nice interesting fight—and we're certainly not going to intervene, even to the extent of saying

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that Mr. Lynwood does sound a shade vitriolic. Hop to it, gentlemen. Argonotes doesn't use bouncers.

FOLLOWS a letter from a first-time writer, getting off his chest some of the things that have probably been bothering him for a long time now.

MARTIN W. FRITH

I am not one who is a chronic "writer-to-editors." In fact, this is my first offense and I have been a long time in getting this under way. I don't consider myself an old hand, having shipped only about ten years ago. But, I know what I like to read and feel that the only way you can gauge the taste of your readers is through the medium of their letters. Hence this one.

Some time ago an issue came out which contained, if I remember correctly, two short sea stories and one sea serial. I am mildly surprised that you haven't been swamped with protests that you were printing too many sea stories. Or haven't you got around to printing them yet? In case you have a complaint on that score, may I say thanks for all the sea yarns you can print just so long as they are up to ARGOSY standard.

Sure, you print stories which don't appeal to me but for every one in that class there are a dozen that I do like.

Before I close, may I list the types of stories which appeal to me in order of their interest?

1. Sea Stories
2. Fantastics & Scientific
3. Sports
4. Historical
5. Detective
6. Westerns (very few)

The finest story which has appeared between the covers of any magazine which I have read was "Annapolis Ahoy" and I would like to see a second story about the same characters. I would favor an ARGOSY quarterly having some of the old favorites reprinted. But Please Keep ARGOSY as She Is.

Hartford, Conn.

And that's about all today, people. Except that December 11th will mark ARGOSY's fifty-fifth anniversary. So start saving up your emeralds everybody. Yes-sir, that's what we get. Emeralds. We looked it up in a book. And we can't think of anything we'd rather have at the moment than a nice emerald desk-set. Of course we hate to hint, but emeralds really are terribly practical.

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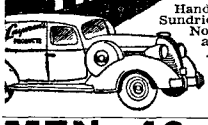

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2. Apply thin application of MERCIREX CREAM. Gently massage into the skin until it penetrates and disappears.

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Address a postal to MERCIREX, Dept. N MILFORD, DEL. for

FREE SAMPLE JAR

One will be promptly mailed—POSTAGE PAID

Can afford the embarrassment caused by UGLY, Itching, Surface

PIMPLES

If you are suffering the discomfort from externally caused Unsightly Skin, Red, Ugly, Itching Pimples, soreness, burning of Eczema or Psoriasis, and itching of Athlete's Foot—Do as thousands have done—Try Soothing Medicated

MERCIREX

Cream and Soap

HERE'S WHAT IT DOES—

MERCIREX CREAM quickly relieves itching, soothes irritated skin—

PROMOTES HEALING

The Soap cleanses the skin, loosens and removes ugly crusts and scales. The Soap and Cream work together. One aids the other.

MERCIREX CREAM is Flesh Color—DOESN'T SHOW. Fragrant scented. No "Druggy Odor".

Trial Size Jar 35c

Regular Size Jar 75c

Soap 25c

COMBINATION PACKAGE— (Cream and Soap) $1.00

Your Druggist stocks or can promptly get* MERCIREX *for you. If not, write us.

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A Money-Making Opportunity

for Men of Character

EXCLUSIVE FRANCHISE FOR

AN INVENTION EXPECTED TO REPLACE A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR INDUSTRY

Costly Work Formerly "Sent Out" by Business Men Now Done by Themselves at a Fraction of the Expense

This is a call for men everywhere to handle exclusive agency for one of the most unique business inventions of the day.

Forty years ago the horse and buggy business was supreme—today almost extinct. Twenty years ago the phonograph industry ran into many millions—today practically a relic. Only a comparatively few foresighted men saw the fortunes ahead in the automobile and the radio. Yet irresistible waves of public buying swept these men to fortune, and sent the buggy and the phonograph into the discard. So are great successes made by men able to detect the shift in public favor from one industry to another.

Now another change is taking place. An old established industry—an integral and important part of the nation's structure—in which millions of dollars change hands every year—is in thousands of cases being replaced by a truly astonishing, simple invention which does the work better—more reliably—AND AT A COST OFTEN AS LOW AS 2% OF WHAT IS ORDINARILY PAID! It has not required very long for men who have taken over the rights to this valuable invention to do a remarkable business, and show earnings which in these times are almost unheard of for the average man.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over $1,600 per month for three months—close to $5,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A Connecticut man writes he has made $55.00 in a single day's time. Texas man nets over $300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from $5 to $60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and income—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

Not a "Gadget"— Not a "Knick-Knack"—

but a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business novices as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspapers, publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to convince a man that he should use an electric bulb to light his office instead of a gas lamp. Nor do you have to sell the same business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the desirability of saving the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for $11 which formerly could have cost them over $200. A building supply corporation pays our man $70, whereas the bill could have been for $1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative $15, whereas the expense could have been over $1,000. A department store has expense of $88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over $2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every section of the country is represented by these field reports which hammer across dazzling, convincing money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a $7.50 order, $5.83 can be your share. On $1,500 worth of business, your share can be $1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67 cents—on ten dollars' worth $6.70, on a hundred dollars' worth $67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning even larger percentage.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation—whatever size the customer says he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer! While others fail to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

No Money Need Be Risked

in trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. *If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded*—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot—regardless of size—*that is a necessity* but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—*that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time*—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, *get in touch with us at once* for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, *use the coupon below*—but send it right away—or wire if you wish. But do it now. *Address*

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